

P. M. Govey.
LENA CAMERON;

OR.

THE FOUR SISTERS.

BY MRS. GREY,

AUTHOR OF "THE BARONET'S DAUGHTERS," "HARRY
MONK," "THE LITTLE WIFE," "THE BELLE OF THE
FAMILY," "SYBIL LENNARD," "THE DUKE AND
THE COUSIN," "THE MANŒUVRING MO-
THER," "THE YOUNG PRIMA DONNA,"
ETC. ETC. ETC.

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THEir RIGHTS

AND THEIR DUTIES

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CHAPTER I.

"Marriage is a matter of more worth
Than to be dealt with by attorneyship."
Henry VI.

Mrs. GENERAL CAMERON was the mother of four daughters, of whom the eldest, Lena, was just eighteen. The preceding winter Lena had "come out," as the phrase goes, under the patronage of the Duchess of Stratheden, an old schoolmate of her mother, and now a leader of ton in London. Lena had been much admired, and might have made a conquest of Lord Sheldon, had not she cared more to talk to Frederick Sackville, a poor cadet of the house of Stratheden. But Sackville did not dare to aspire to her hand; and so, at the end of the season, Lena went home to Beechy Park, where her parents were residing, "unsought and unwon." In her secret heart she cherished the poor cadet's image; but she did not venture to acknowledge this, even to herself.

Mrs. General Cameron was, on the whole, an amiable woman; but she had one weakness—she desired to see her daughters well established. Lena was the first who had come out, and the mother's disappointment at the result of the London season could not be concealed. Luckily, when Lena had been about two months at Beechy Park, a Mr. Beauchamp appeared in the neighbourhood, on a visit to a brother, the rector of a neighbouring parish. He met, and fell in love with Lena. He was rich, and of an old family—all that the mother desired. When, therefore, he proposed to her daughter, the fact that he was a peculiar man, and entirely under the influence of his mother, a still more peculiar woman, weighed nothing with Mrs. Cameron. Lena, mild and ductile in disposition, and ashamed of her unreturned affection for Sackville, was easily induced to accept him. The agreeable news was immediately transmitted to the General, who was in London on business; and he hastened to come down, attended by his eldest son, Gerald, a gay, frank young man.

"Well, mother!" the latter laughingly exclaimed, when they had alighted from the carriage and entered the sitting-room, "you have actually found Lena a husband?"

"Yes, Gerald, is it not charming?" And Mrs. Cameron looked at her husband, expecting from him similar congratulations; but she was disappointed by seeing his countenance only expressive of anxious gravity.

"My dear Laura," he said, "pray let me hear more of this business of Lena's—I started as soon as possible after receiving your letter, although forced to leave some affairs unsettled. It has gone no further, I trust?"

"No further than what, Alick?" exclaimed Mrs. Cameron. "Mr. Beauchamp, as I told you, proposed the day before yesterday, and this morning Lena saw and accepted him. Really you look," she continued, laughing, "as if this was the most fatal, instead of the most fortunate occurrence—as if dear Lena had accepted a scampish young Ensign with next to nothing, rather than the most respectable and estimable Mr. Beauchamp with twenty thousand a-year."

"I wonder," the General replied very gravely, and with a shade of displeasure on his brow, "that you did not wait till I could be on the spot, before you allowed any step so decisive to take place. I know very little personally of the man," General Cameron continued with some warmth, "and do not care a straw about his twenty thousand a-year, or anything else, until I have ascertained that I shall approve of him as a husband for Lena in other respects. Besides, the girl herself—I cannot believe that she cares a fig about him; she is too young to take a fancy in such a hurry."

"My dear Alick, this is too absurd; and why should you fancy Lena does not care for Mr. Beauchamp? I can assure you her acceptance of him was entirely her own act. I did not even give my opinion on the subject, after first laying the proposal before her, for consideration."

"Well, really, if she like him," chimed

in Gerald. "it would certainly be a capital thing. Such a rich fellow! upon my word it would be advantageous to us all."

Until very late that night, Mrs. Cameron continued to descant so ably on the merits of the subject, that the General, who was but too apt to be easily worked upon by the eloquence of his wife—whom he considered perfection in every way—was persuaded to look more brightly and contentedly on the business.

His mind, however, could not be quite at ease until he had ascertained, as he expected to do, by a single glance at Lena's countenance, her sentiments on the subject. When, therefore, on rising the next morning, and being acquainted with the arrival of her father, his young daughter, with conscious, trembling haste, flew to meet him, the General, after tenderly embracing her, held her from him, and gazing in her face, inquired with a fond, earnest smile—

"Why, Lena, what is all this I hear about you?" and as she again hid her face, covered with conscious blushes, on his bosom, he said in an anxious tone—

"Do you really wish it, Lena—do you really love him, child? Remember it is not too late—tell me the truth—exactly what you feel upon the subject."

"What—is your father persuading you to give up Mr. Beauchamp, Lena?" interrupted Mrs. Cameron, who entered at that moment.

"Does not papa wish me to marry Mr. Beauchamp?" asked Lena, hastily looking up with an expression which might have passed either for pleasure or alarm.

"I wish you to do exactly what you think will contribute to your happiness, my dear child. If you think that a marriage with Mr. Beauchamp will accomplish such a desirable end, it would, indeed, be selfish in me to oppose a measure which is so truly advantageous; but it seems to me that it has all been settled with rather too much precipitation. Perhaps," he continued, looking affectionately at his wife, "I might have imagined that the very natural wishes of your dear mother might have in some degree influenced a good and dutiful daughter."

"Your father thinks, Lena, that it was by my persuasion that you accepted Mr. Beauchamp," Mrs. Cameron exclaimed in a slightly injured tone.

"Mamma persuade me—oh, papa!" said Lena, looking up with a sweet expression of reproachful surprise, "she would never persuade me to take any step important to my future happiness against my inclination. No, it was entirely of my own free will that I accepted Mr. Beauchamp," she added with a slight sigh.

"And you do not repent having done

so; you feel no wish to draw back now?" anxiously inquired the General.

Lena paused for a moment in breathless thought, then with a sort of nervous haste murmured "No, no!" and her father saw no reason remaining, why he should not be perfectly satisfied on the subject.

Men are much more easily deceived on such points than women. Little practised themselves in doing violence to their own feelings or inclinations, they trust more to the statements of the lips upon such matters, and are slow to question the cheerful readiness with which women often sacrifice the dearest hopes and feelings of their hearts. When, therefore, Mr. Beauchamp visited Beechy Place that day, he found, most unexpectedly, his future father-in-law there to receive him.

When pecuniary matters came under discussion, all went, *coulour de rose*, for from that most trying ordeal Mr. Beauchamp passed with flying colours, proving himself to the General's fastidious ideas—a perfect gentleman—neither vulgarly bombastic, nor niggardly cautious—with cheerful unconcern laying before him his liberal proposition on the score of settlements which his means made so feasible.

The General also, after beholding the engaged couple together, had little cause for disquiet or doubt. Lena's gentle nature could scarcely be expected to compete with her lover's fervour and absorption, and his conduct was certainly an extreme with which there was no finding fault.

That poor Lena was overpowered at times by the devotion of the exigent lover, who for the first week of their engagement was almost continually passing his days at Beechy Place, was but too evident; for though she seemed passively—nay, even cheerfully, to devote to him her time and attention—his departure generally left her pale and wearied.

Sometimes she might be seen hastening, as from some overpowering task, to the refreshing diversion of her little brother and sisters' innocent affection and caresses, from which in her lover's presence she seemed strictly divided, and once when alone with them on a similar occasion, she had wept passionately, as if her heart would break.

But she ever received Mr. Beauchamp with a smiling countenance, or if less cheerful in his presence than her wont, a remark from him to that effect, would immediately rouse her to exertion.

At the close of that week a letter arrived from Lady Rachel, Mr. Beauchamp's mother, on the subject of her son's marriage. Considering the character of the writer, it was tolerably gracious and complimentary—speaking in polite terms of her approval of her son's choice, and ex-

pressing a hope that a speedy opportunity might be afforded to her, of an introduction to her future daughter-in-law.

This hope drew forth an invitation from the Camerons that Lady Rachel should visit them at Beechy Place, and Mr. Beauchamp was the bearer of the letter to his mother, it being necessary that he should repair to Beauchamp Towers previous to proceeding to London on necessary business relative to the coming event.

For a fortnight, therefore, with the expectation of the daily letters exacted by her lover, on their parting, Lena was left at liberty, to be once more the happy, disengaged daughter and sister.

CHAPTER II.

"—— Nothing now there needs
But fix the day, and draw the marriage deeds."
DUKE.

AMONGST the friends and relatives to be apprised of the event in prospect, the Duchess of Stratheden was of course one of the first in the list, and of the congratulations in return, none proved so sincerely and warmly sympathizing as were her Grace's expressions of joy upon the occasion. She knew so well how anxious Mrs. Cameron was on the subject of her daughters, and truly it was of the utmost importance that girls so slenderly provided for, should marry well. As General Cameron was soon to be ordered to Ireland, and as Beechy Place had been lent to him by the Duke for the summer, the Duchess mentioned her intention of shortly joining the party at the Place, while the Duke insisted upon the Camerons continuing it as their residence till the time of their departure for Ireland, which was to be immediately after the celebration of the marriage. Her Grace also begged that they would not scruple if desirable to invite Lady Rachel, and to assure her ladyship of the pleasure the Duke and herself would feel in making the acquaintance of herself and son beneath their own roof. This polite message was duly conveyed to Lady Rachel, but she—either too scrupulous or too proud to accept an invitation on such terms, declined it—informing her future connexions of her intentions of soon affording herself an opportunity of meeting them, by visiting her younger son at his parsonage.

At the end of a fortnight therefore the Camerons were apprised of the intended arrival of Mr. Beauchamp, and the very next morning, when they only expected a visit from the former, a carriage with post horses drove up to the house. Never perhaps did visitors create more nervous dismay than that which overpowered the

whole party when it was ascertained that it was the formidable Lady Rachel, who had thus taken them by surprise.

Poor Lena shook like an aspen leaf—and Mrs. Cameron judged it expedient to send her from the room to recover herself, previous to appearing before her formidable future mother-in-law. The general hastened to receive Lady Rachel, who entered, followed by her son and eldest daughter. Cold and stately as ever was her bearing—however, with tolerable graciousness she apologized for the breach of etiquette which brought her thus unexpectedly before them, and which she added must be attributed to her son's great *empressement* to present Miss Cameron to her in the present position of his affianced bride. She keenly glanced around the room as if to express her expectation of Lena's presence, whilst Mr. Beauchamp immediately inquired in a tone of surprise, whether she were not acquainted with their arrival; and when Mrs. Cameron excused herself to Lady Rachel for going in person to seek her daughter, on the plea of the timidity which might require some encouragement on her part, to prepare her for this unexpected meeting—Mr. Beauchamp followed her from the room, and requested that he might see Lena before she appeared before his mother. Pale and trembling, therefore, the young girl was soon conducted by Mrs. Cameron to the apartment into which her lover had been shown.

Poor Lena!—the interval that had passed since the departure of Mr. Beauchamp, had been a period, during which, the congratulations pouring in on every side—the exhilaration of her own family—the praises ever sounded in her presence, upon her intended, and above all, the tender kindly intercourse kept up between them by letter—while at the same time she was exempt from the exigent thralldom which his society ever entailed, had given tone to her spirits and had enabled her to look upon her position, in the bright light in which others viewed it—she had even brought herself to contemplate with some feeling of pleasure her intended's return; and even now, no doubt, attempted to interpret her want of any such symptoms, to the counteracting arrival of his mother.

But Mr. Beauchamp required this assurance to be guaranteed by her own explanation of the nervous and little joyous demeanour with which she appeared before him.

"Lena!" he said, gazing keenly into her face, as her pale lips strove to falter her greeting in return for the tender meeting on his part, "you look more frightened than overjoyed at seeing me again."

"Oh! no, I am very glad to see you

again, but I own I am rather nervous at the thoughts of meeting Lady Rachel."

"But why?" Mr. Beauchamp inquired. "Have they described my mother to you, as so very terrible and disagreeable?" he added in an offended tone, and then again preceeded gently but gravely.—

"I assure you she is very kindly disposed towards you, Lena—and you need not fear her—nay! it is very necessary that you, who are to live with her henceforth as a daughter, should love her as your mother; will you try to do so, Lena?"

"I will try to love her as *your* mother," said Lena, in a quick and rather more decided manner than was her wont. "I can never," she added, the colour rising vividly to her cheeks, "love any one as my own dear mother."

Mr. Beauchamp looked slightly surprised on hearing this first assumption of self-will on the part of his gentle love, but he only said, "When a woman leaves her paternal home, she must learn not only to love her husband, but to cleave also to her husband's relatives." Then assuming a more gallant tone and character, he continued, pressing her hand affectionately—"But I am keeping my mother waiting to behold you, and am all impatience myself—now that I have had the pleasure of seeing you for a few moments alone—to present my dearest Lena to her. I have also a sister here, with whom you must renew your acquaintance."

And drawing Lena's arm within his, he conducted her to the drawing-room. Lady Rachel, as soon as she heard the door open, turned her quick sharp eyes towards it—and when Lena appeared leaning on her son's arm, her glance, like lightning, flashed over her with its scrutinizing penetration. But so young and gentle in appearance was the fair girl—that cold and utterly impenetrable indeed would have been the heart, which had not softened towards the young creature.

Even Lady Rachel's austere countenance gradually assumed an expression of satisfaction and approval, when, having risen and stretched forth her hand with gracious condescension, Lena received it with a submissive tearful smile, and a glance almost expressive of supplication towards one whom she might—poor girl! have indeed felt was from henceforth to hold such influence over her destiny and happiness.

"Miss Cameron," said her Ladyship, "I am happy to make your acquaintance—so young as you were when I last saw you, I may call this my first introduction—I must at the same time congratulate you on your prospect of happiness, which—though his mother—I venture to say my son is calculated to confer upon his wife—It may be too premature to express,

from personal knowledge, my approval of his choice, but with the exterior I can have no fault to find."

And again her eyes travelled over Lena from head to foot.

"And from report," she continued, "I have been led to believe, that the mental qualities are accordant," and Lady Rachel stooped and kissed the fair meek brow. "Miss Beauchamp," she then exclaimed, all the natural severity and domination of her nature returning to her tone and manner—"Come and embrace your future sister-in-law, whom I shall expect to see treated by every member of our family with the respect and consideration due to her position, as your brother's affianced wife."

Miss Beauchamp, who on her mother's rising, had done the same, now came forward and embraced her lovely sister-in-law elect, with more signs of feeling than might have been expected from her constrained or sullen appearance.

Miss Beauchamp was a tall—somewhat handsome girl, had it not been for the unnatural restraint which characterized the expression of her countenance.

Lena returned this sisterly embrace in a manner which spoke gratitude for its warmth, and the girls' hands remained within each other's till Lady Rachel coldly invited Lena to sit down by her side; Miss Beauchamp returned to her seat and resumed her impenetrable manner. The conversation then became more general, and lasted till luncheon was announced, at which as usual the younger members of the family joined the party.

The conversation was strictly confined to the three elders; Mr. Beauchamp devoting himself entirely to Lena, and the chicken and jelly, of which they partook side by side. But Gerald, with boylike malice, speedily made an attempt to break the spell of awe which first seemed to bind the spirits of the young party—and soon, by his exertion, some lively sallies began to be exchanged between him and Annie, his second sister, and a little chattering and laughing to be ventured upon by the little ones; which once begun, and encouraged by their father's playful participation, were scarcely to be retained by the scandalized glances of cold astonishment which Lady Rachel launched from one to the other of the offenders.

But whatever general impression this conduct might have given her, of the family with which she was about to connect herself, concerning that member towards whom her most favourable opinion was most important, her sentiments were thus expressed during their drive home:

"Lionel, I am pleased with Miss Cameron—with her gentle, modest demeanour—how she has escaped the influence of

the ill-judged system of education, by which total freedom from subordination and proper constraint has been but too evidently engendered in her brothers and sisters, is a miracle!—But, as far as I can judge—and I am not often wrong in the opinions which I form—Miss Cameron is calculated not only to make you the obedient and dutiful wife you have a right to expect, but is one whom I can also admit into familiar intercourse with my daughters—without fear of those principles of perfect submission being undermined, which I have and ever will maintain, as long as they remain under my authority; may she prove to them a pattern and example of meekness and propriety of conduct.”

CHAPTER III.

My soul aches,
To know, when two authorities are up,
Neither supreme, how soon confusion
May enter 'twixt the gap of both, and take
The one by the other.

SHAKESPEARE'S *Coriolanus*.

“WELL, Lena, Lady Rachel seemed very much pleased with her daughter-in-law; how very affectionate and gracious she was in her manner to you, my dearest!” remarked Mrs. Cameron, after her guests had departed.

“I should hope so, indeed,” said the General; “do you think I would allow Lena to marry any man, whose mother presumed to be anything but kind and gracious to her?”

“But, dear Lena,” her mother continued, “you must not be too timid and submissive before Lady Rachel—you must remember that when you are Mrs. Beauchamp, you must assert your own dignity and rights as a married woman, and particularly will this be requisite if Lady Rachel live with you, as she is at first to do. Her Ladyship will take advantage—as in such cases mothers-in-law are apt too willingly to do—of any want of energy, or spirit, and self-assumption in their son's wife, to maintain the authority and precedency they have before exercised in that son's establishment—nay, their influence even over the husband himself.”

Poor Lena! her mind glanced hopelessly over such a prospect—*she*, endeavouring to strive successfully, under such circumstances, with a Lady Rachel!—and the General remarked—

“Oh, of course there will be some definite arrangement made, as to the respective situations Lena and Lady Rachel are to hold, if a united establishment continue to be the plan.” Lady Rachel remained about a week in the neighbourhood, during which time daily visits were exchanged between the two parties. Lena frequently

passed hours alone at the Parsonage, and was even taken by her Ladyship *tête-à-tête* drives, when Miss Beauchamp was permitted to ride out with her brother. During these excursions, Lady Rachel ever treated her with the most gracious kindness. She might almost have seemed desirous of obtaining an influence over her daughter-in-law's affections.

And this would have been flattering to Lena's feelings, had it not been at the expense of another's, and as she sometimes feared, at the risk of drawing upon her the dislike of her future sister-in-law, by the praises and invidious comparisons of which she was made the object. And Lena, who would fain have become better acquainted with Miss Beauchamp, was surprised at discovering how completely Lady Rachel seemed to discountenance any attempts at greater intimacy and confidence between them.

To Lena's parents, her Ladyship was civility itself. Indeed, towards the General she even seemed inclined to bend into something like friendly and easy intercourse. Between the two ladies, there might have been discerned more of mistrust and constraint.

It could not escape Mrs. Cameron's perception that she was looked upon with no great cordiality by Lady Rachel. But this did not so much trouble her, as something she discovered in the demeanour of her future son-in-law—a cold keeping back as it were, in his manner towards her, which caused her to draw in a little from those frank, familiar terms she had at first attempted to establish between them for Lena's sake; for she was as independent in spirit as her husband.

Poor Mrs. Cameron! she was beginning to think that after all, it was not quite such unmixed happiness, marrying a daughter. The event which she had so long anticipated with such delight, was now within her grasp, and how did she feel? Often very much inclined to repent having so warmly forwarded the suit of a man she began to dislike. But then, again, she brought the bright side of the picture before her mind—she looked upon the splendour and advantage of the match—Ireland and banishment were words ever repeated to spur her on—her beautiful child buried alive, and wasting all her first bloom—and then the constant *refrain*, that it was so very desirable that she should marry her daughters!

It was a comfort to Mrs. Cameron to be able to pour forth her doubts and misgivings into the friendly ear of the Duchess of Stratheden, who arrived at Beechy Place a day or two previous to the departure of Lady Rachel, and in the bitterness of her spirit, she even felicitated her friend on having no daughters.

Mr. Beauchamp remained at the Rectory after his mother's departure, for the day of the marriage was yet to be fixed. It was to be as early a one as the lawyers would permit, for no longer than another month could the General be spared from his post in Ireland. Therefore on Mr. Beauchamp presenting himself at Beechy Place, one morning, and during a private interview with the General on other matters of business, begging to be told the day on which he might be permitted to claim the hand of his affianced, the General, in a tone of sadness, and with a sigh which could not be repressed, answered—

"I think, then, that about the last day of the approaching month—October—must be the latest time to which the event can be postponed, as I must then start for Athlone. But, my dear Beauchamp, there is still one point on which Mrs. Cameron and myself have decided on the expediency of speaking to you. It would have been better, perhaps, to have done so before, for it is a subject of some delicacy; but you must forgive us, in consideration of our great anxiety for our child's happiness."

"My dear sir," exclaimed Mr. Beauchamp, "pray explain yourself—I should have imagined that you had been already well assured of my ardent desire to do everything to contribute to the felicity of your daughter."

"It is on the subject of the intended plan of Lady Rachel's constant residence with you after your marriage that I wish to speak," General Cameron continued.

Mr. Beauchamp looked up quickly.

"Now, to speak plainly," continued the General, "I have from experience remarked, that arrangements of that description never perfectly answer. With the best intentions and the most favourable dispositions for such a union of interests, perfect domestic happiness and unanimity are seldom found to be the consequence. However, in the present instance, with so perfectly amiable and yielding a disposition as Lena's, I fear not for any breach of amity between the parties; but that she might be likely to allow herself too easily to sink into a more passive abjuration of positive importance, than is right or proper for one in her position."

"Is it then your desire, General Cameron, that this arrangement, of which, from the first, you were informed, should be broken through? I think, indeed," Mr. Beauchamp added, with somewhat of haughtiness, "that this point should have been before discussed."

"You misunderstand us," interposed Mrs. Cameron; "we only wish, for our own satisfaction, to understand exactly every point which concerns our child, and I am sure you will find it add much to

your own future comfort, if some definite conditions are drawn out, as to the manner in which your joint establishment is to be regulated. Whether it be into the hands of your wife, or your mother you purpose to commit the chief reins of government?" Mrs. Cameron continued with a smile; wishing, if possible, to place the discussion on an amiable and playful, rather than a business-like and serious footing.

"I should have imagined," Mr. Beauchamp answered coldly, "that was a point which might have been easily and sufficiently settled hereafter between the parties whom it concerned; but I shall be happy, as it seems necessary to explain myself further on the subject, and first premise, that my mother—having been in a most unaccountable manner, left by my father, unprovided with the usual Dower House, and with a jointure, which, though ample, was far from sufficient for the separate maintenance of herself and family, in the style and comfort to which she had ever been accustomed through life—in consequence of these circumstances, I, as it was only proper in a son, pressed on her my home—offered that she should make it hers as long as it pleased her to retain it—certainly neglecting to provide for any such contingency as the present, or rather forgetting that any might possibly arise—not imagining that a wife might bring forward objections to such an arrangement—or the friends of a wife, I ought to say. For Miss Cameron," he continued with a softened tone and expression, which rather smoothed the feelings which Mr. Beauchamp's rising haughtiness of manner was beginning to kindle within the General's breast—"as for Miss Cameron, by her, I am tempted to believe, no such objection will be interposed."

"No, Beauchamp; Lena is too young—too inexperienced—too amiable, we may add, to have any such fears and previsions," the General added; "for that very reason it is more our duty to supply their place, and you must be aware if you consider without prejudice the subject, that our objections and misgivings are not without foundation. Yes," continued General Cameron, "I will continue to maintain my opinion, and declare that I would, with more comfort, see a daughter of mine become the mistress of a far more humble home, than the joint ruler, under such circumstances, of a palace."

Mr. Beauchamp paused for a moment before proceeding, and then, as if with an effort to master any further manifestation of displeasure, quietly said—

"I should have thought, for my part, that to be placed for the first few years of her married life, in a situation which—whilst insuring to Lena the respect and

consideration due to her, as a wife and mistress of a household, yet spared the toil and trouble—the care and responsibility generally entailed upon a young person in such a position—would be the surest plan by which I could have secured the happiness of one so little accustomed to such matters—to say nothing of the advantage in experience and information which she could not fail to acquire from the example of so superior a head as Lady Rachel's. But I see the views of Miss Cameron's parents are not the same—for my part I never for a moment contemplated the incompatibility of two such persons as Lady Rachel Beauchamp and Miss Cameron dwelling under the same roof without endangering the happiness of either—nor did I foresee the unfavourable impression which my excellent mother must have made upon my future connexions, and I grieve to add, their seeming distrust of my care and affection towards my intended wife. Under such circumstances, I scarcely know what to propose."

The General and Mrs. Cameron wished to explain, in a more favourable view, their ideas upon the subject, but Mr. Beauchamp begged to be allowed to continue.

"If Mrs. Cameron," he said, "wish to ascertain the rules and regulations by which our domestic establishment is to be arranged, I can only state, that I intend my mother should still continue her former position as directress of the household; both because I consider her more suited, by her years and dignity, for those duties, from which I would fain spare my delicate and gentle Lena, for some years to come, and also because such an arrangement will leave us more liberty for the constant enjoyment of each other's society, and enable us to devote ourselves without interruption to those interests and employments we shall share together. My tastes and pursuits are of a most sedentary character, and my habits wholly domestic."

The General and his wife could scarcely forbear a smile at this last clause of the argument. A slight curl on Mrs. Cameron's lip, might have given rise to the idea, that had her thoughts been embodied in words, they might have expressed the uncourteous exclamation of, "What a bore of a husband!" However, Mr. Beauchamp proceeded without further interruption—

"The private suite of apartments, which I shall appropriate to the especial use of myself and my wife, will render us as free and independent of the interference and intrusion of others upon our private hours, as a married pair can desire. Beyond this, what other arrangements can now be made without offence to my mo-

ther, and dissatisfaction to myself, I must say I am at a loss to imagine."

"Well," said the General, rising and walking towards the fire-place, and leaning his head upon his hand with a movement which told that he was little satisfied, "I know not what to say about it—I sincerely trust this plan may be found to answer—but—"

"You yet doubt it," interrupted Mr. Beauchamp warmly; "in that case indeed, I can hardly wish you to allow your daughter—"

"May I come in?" sounded at that moment in a sweet voice as the handle of the door having turned, it gently opened, and Lena made her appearance, like an angel of peace and quiet amongst the ruffled party.

She had come with some message to her mother, from the Duchess, with whom she had been sitting.

Her father, when she had delivered it, drew her towards him tenderly, and kissed her with an earnestness of affection—almost of sad significance. At least so it appeared to Mr. Beauchamp, whose feelings were at that moment not a little susceptible of tenacious jealousy. And Lena, who had not failed to perceive the offended cloud upon her lover's brow—the gravity on that of her father—and a certain look of disquiet on Mrs. Cameron's expressive countenance, in her turn began to be alarmed and anxious, as her eyes glanced timidly from one to the other.

Mr. Beauchamp noticed that her observation had been attracted—for he had fixed his eyes somewhat gloomily, though earnestly upon her face—and he now said in a tone which was slightly tremulous—

"Are you, also, Miss Cameron, of your parents' opinion upon the present painful subject, the discussion of which you agreeably interrupted—is it your conviction that the happiness of your life will be destroyed by dwelling under the same roof with my mother? Can you not brook the idea of her sharing with you the authority and influence of our establishment? Is it your desire that her son should dismiss her from beneath his roof—or rather to force that son to withdraw from his mansion—for I must declare, such a step would be far more bearable to me than the other—in order to leave my mother in unmolested possession of the home I had promised should ever be hers?"

Poor Lena turned very pale at these sudden and unexpected questions, thus directly put to her by her excited, agitated lover, and she anxiously turned an inquiring gaze towards her mother.

"No! Answer for yourself, Lena, if you please," Mr. Beauchamp continued; "I wish for your own unbiassed sentiments; and that the sincerity and but too

tervent ardour of my affection may evince itself by still further proof—one which I grieve to perceive is so much required;” he glanced reproachfully at General and Mrs. Cameron, “I will even declare myself resolved to yield entirely to your decision—painful as will be the conduct which it may entail upon me. As I have just said, I am ready to trample on all my long-arranged plans, if you, also, concur in the fear and dislike of living with my mother.”

“I wish to part you from your mother! Oh papa! Dear mamma, why do you desire it? To part a mother and a son who had always intended to live together, happy and united, like”—Lena paused with a slight sigh—she was going to say, “like our own family,” but there rose before her fancy, counteracting images, checking the cheerful spirit with which thus innocently she pleaded against herself; and her eyes, lifted before with such confidence and animation, drooped more sadly—timidly, as she continued—

“Why should my entrance into Lady Rachel’s family endanger my own or her happiness? I am sure for my part it will be my endeavour to please your mother, Mr. Beauchamp. Do you not think I shall be able to do so, dear father?” and she looked with pained surprise on the General, whose eyes she beheld glistening through tears as he gazed upon her as she thus so sweetly spoke.

“If all were angels like yourself, my child, I should doubt not your power of pleasing, or kindness and happiness being your portion under any circumstances or situation of life. And indeed,” the father added, looking tenderly upon her, “I can still scarcely image to myself the contrary; therefore, I will say no more upon the subject, but rely upon the affection of your husband (which he indeed wrongs me in supposing me to doubt), for shielding you from all that may prove inimical to your peace and happiness.”

“Of that I have already given you assurance, General,” Mr. Beauchamp replied with softened emotion, as one hand of Lena’s was pressed with almost worshipping tenderness within his own. “If you or your dear daughter have ever any cause for complaint, save perhaps of the too jealous fervour of my watchful affection, I shall deserve indeed to forfeit every blessing which the possession of such a treasure bestows upon me.”

Mrs. Cameron now interposed with some cheerful, soothing words, in order to break up the conference with less solemnity and gravity, and thus pacifically, if not satisfactorily or with benefit to the future happiness of the parties concerned, did this at first threatening scene terminate.

CHAPTER IV.

“Look where she comes
In sweetness like the hawthorn-buds unblown;
While the proud bridegroom, like the month of May,
Steps on ‘midst flowers.”

BARRY CORNWALL.

THE next month glided quickly away, and it was perhaps fortunate that there was so much occupation during its duration, to fill the minds of the Camerons, to the exclusion of any idle broodings over the prospect of that event which at its conclusion was to take place. There were the double preparations for Lena’s wedding and the removal of the family to Ireland, which was immediately to succeed its celebration.

Lena’s sisters talked of the numerous future visits to her—their delight in being welcomed to her beautiful home—and though the clinging heart of Lena sank low with trembling dismay at the idea of the change which awaited her, the young are blest with a comparative thoughtlessness of the future; though the present may weigh heavily on their youthful spirits, their anticipations of the morrow are ever vaguely and slowly realized.

So although the betrothed did sometimes sit in pale and pitiful dejection, surrounded by the splendid wedding presents and bridal *trousseau* amidst which her sisters flitted admiringly, like butterflies from flower to flower, though they did make her heart ache and cause her bosom to swell with suppressed weeping, as she looked upon all these preparations as signals of what was to come, she was calmer—more cheerful, perhaps, than might have been expected—till, indeed, the day came closely upon them, and then there was much grief and sadness pervading the whole household—all shrunk from the idea of losing the treasured of their hearts—the gentle, loving being so prized by all!

But on the morning of the marriage the chilling presence of Lady Rachel—who, with her youngest daughter, honoured the occasion with her presence—seemed to have the power of repressing all feeling and emotion, within their proper bounds of decorum and propriety—Mr. Beauchamp had no cause to be dissatisfied with the deportment of his bride, for nought but the trembling timid demeanour, natural to her situation, was visible to give offence to his own complacent feelings, on the occasion.

We will not enter into a minute description of the ceremony. The party was small—the Duke, Duchess, and a very few near relations and friends, comprised the whole of the company.

The General was powerfully affected during the ceremony—Mrs. Cameron was

enabled to maintain her composure very tolerably. She looked beautiful; and her youthful appearance was most striking, when the eye fell upon the numbers of tall children by which she was surrounded.

Poor Lena—she stood in the midst of the assembled guests after the ceremony was over, in the drawing-room at Beechy Place, leaning on her husband's arm, to be looked at and congratulated. She would not weep if she could help it—though she felt her powers of suppression fast melting away. So, whilst she smiled faintly in answer to those who addressed, or commented upon her, she fixed her large dark eyes on the most joyous object she could find—her youngest brother's smiling face gazing upon her with cheerful, childlike curiosity. But it was too dear an object to serve long as a preservative to her composure; soon as she gazed upon the child she loved so tenderly, her eyes were blinded by the swelling drops, and Mr. Beauchamp was in another moment leading her away, in order that she might vent her uncontrollable emotion in greater privacy. Annie and Janet immediately followed in her train.

"Mamma says," they exclaimed, "Lena is to come with us, and you, Mr. Beauchamp, are to go to the breakfast."

But the brother-in-law still retained his bride from them, with grave determination.

"I should have wished you to have accompanied me, Lena," he said, "if it were only for a few minutes—do you not think you can compose yourself sufficiently to please me?"

"Oh no, Mr. Beauchamp!" Annie hastily exclaimed, "I am sure she would much rather not—and really you must leave her with us—we, who are to lose her directly for, perhaps, a very long time—would you not rather go with us, dear Lena?"

"Oh yes!" cried Lena, turning towards them from Mr. Beauchamp, sobbing.

"Well," Mr. Beauchamp said, yielding her reluctantly, "I must only beg that you will not agitate yourself with your sisters—you know," he added, addressing himself with severe gravity to the two girls, "that Lena has a long journey before her. You must not be allowed to weep, my love," he again repeated to the young bride, "or a headache will be the consequence."

"Oh, she cannot help it, Mr. Beauchamp; it is impossible!" Annie somewhat petulantly exclaimed.

"But she will try for my sake," was his grave rejoinder, and Lena was led away.

The breakfast was over, the carriage at the door, and Mrs. Cameron soon saw the first bride of the family depart from her,

with feelings little similar to those she had once expected to have experienced, at such an epoch of her existence.

The married pair were to pass the honeymoon in the Isle of Wight. They were retarded a few hours after their departure, by a slight accident, which obliged the carriage to stop for some moments. Mr. Beauchamp had himself impatiently alighted to superintend the necessary repairs. Whilst thus employed, a young man rode past, and paused for a moment to see what was going on; but his attention was quickly riveted by the lovely occupant of the chariot, whose beautiful head, drooping with dejection, was visible at the window against which she languidly reclined. Her fair, young face was bedewed with fast dropping tears, which—profiting by the absence of her bridegroom, she suffered to trickle unrestrained.

The young man's heart beat quick and painfully. For a moment he felt bewildered, as if a vision had appeared before his eyes. But then the whole character of the scene before him suggested explanatory recollections—rendered more lucid by the bridal appearance of the gentleman, who with a surprised and half-offended countenance, now hastily turned towards him, from the operations he was overlooking.

Soon, indeed, was the young stranger disenchanted. He bowed with crimsoned brow, murmured some offers of assistance—civilly, but coldly declined by Mr. Beauchamp—and Lena, awaking from the bewilderment with which she had at first gazed on the well-known face, now began to make some embarrassed signs of recognition.

The young man, who seemed to hesitate whether or not it would be proper to address her further, finally bowed again and rode on.

"Do you know that person, Lena?" asked Mr. Beauchamp in a tone of slight annoyance.

"Oh yes! it was Mr. Frederick Sackville, a near relation of the Duchess of Stratheden; I knew him in London," Lena answered.

"You had better not sit so forward, my love," Mr. Beauchamp remarked; "we are close to Brighton, which is very full now; we shall be very likely to fall in with acquaintances, and these *rencontres* are not very agreeable at this moment. A weeping bride especially," he added, looking on the signs of recent tears visible on her face with an air of reproach, "should not be exposed to the vulgar gaze."

And he lowered her veil, so that if he could not plainly bid her tears not to flow, at least he might not see her shed them.

CHAPTER V.

"There was a shadow on their mirth;
A vacant place is on their hearth,
When at the purple evening's close,
Around its fire-light gathered those
With whom her youth's sweet course had run."
L. E. L.

WE will not dilate upon the desolate blank occasioned by the departure of the much-loved bride. It was felt almost like a second death in the family by her relations. The dreary autumn weather, and the consequent gloom which it cast over the outward aspect of Beechy Place and its environs, tended to increase the depression of their spirits, and it was, perhaps, better for them all that the opportunity of indulging those feelings, was interrupted by a break in their family party, although it was one by no means palatable to any of their tastes.

Two days after the wedding, the Duchess was taken by surprise by Lady Rachel's graciously accepting an invitation to spend a few days at Beechy Place. Her Ladyship even fixed the day immediately following that on which she received the invitation; it not being her wish, she said, to trespass on the bounds she had fixed as to the period of her absence from home. For this favour her noble hostess later discovered, that she was indebted to a disagreement which had taken place between the domineering mother and her clerical son during the few days of their sojourn together. This opportunity therefore of a removal from the roof of her offending child to the abode of his noble neighbours, afforded her a more dignified and convenient mode of showing forth her displeasure, than by a premature departure in dudgeon from the country.

Her ladyship arrived then with her youngest daughter, a tall girl of sixteen—rather pretty, in spite of the disadvantages of dress—and the misery, through shyness and fear, with which in her mother's presence she seemed oppressed and subdued. By the arrangement however of the Duchess,—to which as a guest Lady Rachel was forced in a measure to submit—the young Agnes, during her stay at Beechy, was spared from much of that infliction, by being appointed to form one of the school-room party. But if Lady Rachel could have fully realized the idea of the perfect freedom and joyous cheer of this school-room, into which her daughter was introduced as an honorary member, in contrast with the iron discipline of her own home, her ideas of decorum would truly have been outraged. All was holiday too during that unsettled period, and although Annie and Janet had at first been really miserable and depressed by the loss of their sister, their rebounding natures

and the salutary call on their exertions by Miss Beauchamp's visit, enabled them soon to rally, and their efforts were not a little encouraged by the agreeable surprise of finding their guest not quite the hopelessly despondent, frightened creature, she had appeared to them under different circumstances—but indeed wonderfully disposed, under the influence of her temporary relief from parental oversight, to expand into sociability and unconstraint. Luckily for her, the school-room establishment was sufficiently isolated from the precincts inhabited by the elders, for the indulgence of the social merriment its walls often resounded, and Agnes Beauchamp was soon excited into taking a part therein, without danger of the joyous sounds reaching the ears of her lady mother.

But it was amusing—or rather we ought to say sad, to note with what a sudden change—how like a flower at the approach of night—the girl would shrink and close up, as soon as her parent's presence—or even vicinity, cast its shadow over her. One of the greatest sources of martyrdom endured by young Agnes at this time, was caused by the *malice prepense* of the young Gerald Cameron, who, in order to shock Lady Rachel, would talk to her, and intrude upon her his boyish attentions in her mother's very face, and in a manner which frightened her to death—indeed she knew that if observed, it would at once put an end to all her present enjoyed liberty—nay, she doubted not, to the visit itself, if it were remotely suspected by Lady Rachel to what a degree she was exposed to the company of the youth during the day.

Young Cameron finding the society of his lively young sisters more to his taste than the chilling atmosphere of Lady Rachel's presence, passed most of the time, supposed by her Ladyship to be spent by him in the duties of secretaryship business for his father, ministering to the amusements and enlivenment of the school-room party. This delusion, for the peace and quiet of the poor girl, the other ladies aided in maintaining; Agnes's fears and cautions against any such discovery, affording no little entertainment to the youth himself, whilst it surprised his sisters, who could not at all understand why it should be.

"Why, Miss Agnes, I suppose you are kept like a mouse in a trap at home?" Gerald exclaimed, one day; when she was forced to refuse in terror to join in some *escapade*, proposed by her companions by way of amusement—too boldly in defiance of discovery, and the awful consequences which would thereby inevitably accrue.

"How came it, then, may I ask?" continued Gerald, "that Lady Rachel was induced to bring you to the wedding in-

stead of your sisters, who are as it is called—'come out?'"

"As it is called, indeed?" was Agnes's reply, "but except that they do not learn as many lessons, and are taken out occasionally by my mother——"

"From which honour I should think they would rather be excused," was Gerald's parenthesis, and without contradiction from Miss Beauchamp.

"Except that!" she continued, "there is no great difference in being out. I was certainly surprised at being brought into Sussex; it was not so arranged until the morning we started—my sisters being ready dressed to go, but they were sent back up stairs by Mamma, who was not pleased with their appearance, or something of that sort, I suppose. The carriage was postponed for an hour or two—my clothes huddled together, and I was made ready to accompany Mamma."

"And were your sisters disappointed?" asked Annie and Janet.

"Oh no!" was the answer, "they are used to such adventures, and I dare say they will have great fun."

"When the cat's away the mice may play," laughed Gerald.

Agnes laughed too.

"Then there really is fun going on sometimes at Beauchamp Towers?" asked Janet.

"Oh, yes, sometimes; for our rooms are separated from the rest of the house, and when they are quite sure that Mamma is thoroughly occupied with company, or other matters, Rachel and Amelia do pretty well what they like."

"But are not your governesses very strict?"

"Oh, my sisters have got rather above them now; and the governesses are, I think, becoming weary of the task of keeping them in order, and leave them more to their own devices. I am kept at it still pretty tightly—but that will, I hope, soon be over—and then——"

She broke off with a heavy sigh, as even then no very bright anticipation presented itself.

"How charming it will be for you to have dear Lena as a sister! she will be so kind and affectionate, and make Mr. Beauchamp intercede for you to be a great deal with her," remarked Annie.

"Oh, no; I dare say we shall be very little together," replied Agnes. "The apartments prepared for her and Lionel are far from ours; we have never seen much of our brother, except when he has been sent by Mamma to lecture us—and I suppose we shall see as little of his wife."

"An extraordinary establishment, indeed!" Gerald exclaimed. "Well, I hope when I am invited to the Towers to see my sister, Lady Rachel will depute me

some grave office—father confessor perhaps—to the school-room department, and we will see if we cannot contrive to get up a little amusement."

Agnes gave a hopeless sigh, which, however, was followed by a laugh; the last almost she laughed at Beechy, for an unfortunate finale was put that very afternoon to Miss Agnes's short-lived reign of liberty and enjoyment.

The weather—so hopelessly rainy the first few days of the Beauchamps' visit—having cleared up, the carriage was ordered for the ladies, and the young party were left to walk, as was supposed by Lady Rachel. Indeed strict injunctions were given by her to Agnes that such should be her mode of passing the afternoon—to walk with the governess in demure order, up and down the dry shrubbery. But the sea looked so fresh and tempting from the downs, into which the girls ventured, by the little wicket opening upon them, that Annie and Janet entreated Miss Manners to let them walk thither; and not even the necessity of leaving their guest behind, could induce the high-spirited, indulged little maidens to resist the temptation after their long confinement, of an expedition with the pony to the delightful sea beach.

Agnes Beauchamp evidently considered that it would be as much as her life was worth, the discovery of such a transgression of her mother's injunctions. Alas! it was from the discovery not the transgression the unfortunate girl had through injudicious severity been brought to shrink, with terror! She was therefore left, after some hesitation on the part of her young friends.

"Oh! I wish I could marry!" she exclaimed, bitterly—"or run away somewhere, and live in a cottage and work for my bread—anything to be at peace, and kindly treated." And images and wishes were conjured up before her mind which probably would never have visited the girl of a happier culture and education.

At length she heard Gerald Cameron, who, with his gun on his shoulder, came up to the little gate on which she leant—gay and handsome as he always was. Having heard from her—startled and confused by his sudden appearance—an explanation of her solitary state, he declared it was very rude of his sisters to have thus deserted her—that he would give them a good scolding, and finally invited her to take a brisk walk with him along the pleasure-grounds. She complied with this invitation, but at first seemed little at her ease, listening to every sound like a startled hare, and asking every moment if Gerald did not hear the carriage.

"Oh! you need not expect them home for some time," at length Gerald said,

smiling at her alarm; "but why should you care about it, even were the carriage to arrive?"

"Certainly I must run in—I must be up stairs before mamma returns," replied Agnes.

"Why?" questioned her companion.

"Oh! she would be dreadfully angry to find me out alone."

"Alone!" said Gerald; "you are with me."

"Oh! that would be a thousand times worse; you must not tell mamma, if you please, that—that—"

"That we took a little walk together—nonsense—what's the harm?" said Gerald. The girl coloured and hung her head.

"I don't know," she replied; "but she would think it very shocking—if she found us out."

"Found us out!" repeated Gerald to himself, quite provoked; for with his clear, good judgment, young as he was, he felt the folly, to say the least of it, of bringing up a girl in such a manner—of putting such notions into her head—leading only to hypocrisy and deceit.

Gerald pitied her from the bottom of his heart, and began gradually to draw her out to confide in him a history of her grievances, which his kind, frank, sympathizing manner, soon encouraged her to do with considerable animation; till, in the interest and excitement of her tale, she forgot to mark how the shadows were deepening on the beach-trees, the moments passing unmarked, and also that the moisture of the leaf-strewn ground would cause the sound of the carriage-wheels to be less audible.

They were talking of Lena—Gerald telling Agnes to make a friend of his sweet, kind sister—saying how sure he was that her amiability would effect much of amelioration for them all—when suddenly Lady Rachel stood before them. The poor girl shrank at once before her. Gerald bowed in fearless confidence; but thought it best to be the first to speak, and therefore said—

"I trust your ladyship has had a pleasant drive—my sisters, I am shocked to say, had the impoliteness to leave Miss Beauchamp to a solitary walk."

"Not solitary, it seems!" her ladyship responded, with a sneer.

"No, not since I was allowed the pleasure of joining your daughter," Gerald coolly but civilly replied.

"Miss Agnes Beauchamp doubtless fully appreciated the pleasure," her ladyship continued; "but it is one in which it is not my pleasure that she should indulge—her own room, rather than the open shrubbery, would have been the more proper place for her, in the absence of the Miss Camerons and their governess. How-

ever," she added, her brow growing darker and darker, "this is the consequence of bringing young ladies of her age out of their proper sphere—from the privacy and restraint of their own school-room. It will teach me wisdom for the future. Miss Agnes, you will oblige me by accompanying me to our apartments."

On retiring for the night, Lady Rachel announced her intention of bringing her visit to an end the following day; an intimation her host and hostess had little inclination to resist.

Gerald was by far the most uncomfortable of the party—the evening was passed by him in much disquiet of spirit—so truly did he compassionate poor Agnes—and when, the next morning, she was suffered to make her appearance, equipped for the journey, close by her mother's side, to take leave of the assembled family—he took advantage of any necessary withdrawal of the Cerberus eye of Lady Rachel to cast looks of kindness and commiseration upon her; and the quick sidelong glances darted in return from beneath the drooping eyelashes, showed that he was not only answered, but with deep expression and understanding.

How much more interest and importance had the *tête-à-tête* shrubbery walk received, from the persecution which had been its consequence, than twenty such walks would otherwise have effected!

Poor Agnes had soon entered the carriage, and bid adieu to liberty, light and joy, for many a long and weary day; but there would exist henceforth a ray of sunshine at her heart, amidst the darkness of her existence—a pleasing dream of romance to beguile the weariness of bondage.

CHAPTER VI.

"Thou hast been reared too tenderly,
Beloved too well and long,
Watch'd by too many a gentle eye—
Now look on life—be strong!
But oh! too beautiful and blest
Thy home of youth hath been!
Where shall thy wing, poor bird, find rest,
Shut out from that sweet scene?"

Mrs. HEMANS.

AFTER about a month's sojourn in the Isle of Wight, the married pair arrived to take up their abode at Beauchamp Towers.

It was only that same morning on their journey, that Mr. Beauchamp had broken to her the fact of having resisted an invitation from her parents to meet them at —, where they were to remain a day on their route for Ireland. Mr. Beauchamp's reason for thus acting was listened to with tears of disappointment. He deemed that it would have been only cruelty to have

exposed her to the pain of a second parting; he had, therefore, requested her parents not to mention it in their letters to their daughter, and then he concluded by informing her, that on that very day they were all to embark. Their letter of farewell he then drew forth and presented to her. Poor Lena! she could not read it for her blinding tears, and then her husband remarked that her agitation, even on this occasion, but confirmed the prudence of the course he had pursued.

Thus, though her sweet temper soon enabled her to accept his attempts at consolation, and to rally sufficiently to resume her patient placidity ere she arrived at the Towers, and to receive the gracious welcome of her mother-in-law with becoming cheerfulness, yet she could not combat with the feeling of desolation which stole over her, when at length she found herself released from the necessity of exertion, in the solitude of her stately apartments. Thither she had been immediately conducted after her arrival, by her husband and his mother; and paraded, first, through the suite of sitting-rooms, boudoir, and sleeping-chamber, with proud complacent certainty of the surprise and gratification, with which their luxury—even splendour, must inevitably strike her.

And Lena had striven not to disappoint that expectation, but by her smiles, admiration and thanks, to show forth demonstrations of that nature.

"I flatter myself, indeed," Lady Rachel had then observed, "that no princess could find reason to discover any fault in the accommodation and arrangements we have prepared for you, Mrs. Beauchamp; and now, Lionel, having established your lady in her territory, I must request you to leave her for a space to repose after her journey, and you will not grudge me an hour's conference before dressing-time on business which has been awaiting your return."

Mr. Beauchamp complied; but not with great readiness. He had adopted the idea that his young wife could not—or ought not to be left alone for ten minutes together—an idea, which was certainly kindness most mistaken, as all who have ever been thus tried will most assuredly agree.

Lena thought to enjoy a period of relief when the door of the apartment had closed her in—and venturing to disobey her husband's considerate commands that she should ring for her maid, and have lights—for the short November afternoon was fast closing in—she seated herself on a low stool near the fire, and rested her head upon the couch by its side.

But busy thought soon recalled recollections which rendered her freedom from constraint but very loneliness indeed. In her mind's eye she saw the vessel which

bore so many dear ones far from her—never before had she so fully realized the idea that she was separated for so many a long day from all those dear, familiar beings—from a mother's love and care, from a father's tenderness—from brothers' and sisters' "joyous cheer." It was being alone indeed, now that she felt she could not people that strange, grand room with their loved faces, or hear their dear voices break the stately quiet of all around.

She was in her future home; but could she ever feel it home, with every object seeming coldly frowning upon her in its strangeness. She began to wish for her husband's return. She felt so desolate and forlorn. But no—he had better stay away a little longer, for much as she might and ought to appreciate his anxious care, yet at that moment it was for other affections her heart was yearning—the ties of nature were pressing round it—and she felt she should receive no sympathy from him—nay, she must hide her feelings—if she would not, by his countenance at least, be reproached; for she knew, alas! he deemed that his love should *now* be her all in all—that leaving father and mother, her heart and soul should cleave wholly unto her husband.

But how cast off at once the cords which had bound her from her cradle, with such gentle but steadfast force? As a little child bereft of the parents' arms, and set to run alone, she felt; if unsupported by their powers, she could scarcely stand—but her love for those beloved ones was an offence to her husband! She would endeavour not to intrude it upon him, and yet she thought—had he but allowed her to weep forth her filial sorrow upon his bosom, unblamed; unrepressed, far from doing wrong to the affection he had claimed, the feeling would but have mingled in her heart more surely, with the other affections already implanted there by nature.

Our readers will no doubt deem this a most gloomy picture of the feelings of a bride, only just past the month of honeyed bliss—dismal indeed;—so different from the idea generally formed of that epoch, so interesting to every female heart. But let us remember that Lena's was no marriage of love. Too true it was that the young girl had sacrificed all idea of self, in the business, on the shrine of what she considered filial devotion. She married to please her mother, not herself. Lena was as backward in womanly notions as she was young in years—she had never thought of any love save that of father, mother, brother, sisters. Had she really loved her husband with that love which passeth all other, she would not have felt thus desolate.

The young wife might have sorrowed

at leaving the home of her childhood, and all the dear ones it contained, but there is a mysterious charm which binds devoted wedded hearts, and seems to loosen every other tie. The loving bride weeps—yet she willingly departs, and clings at once to him alone; with him all places—all circumstances are alike; he is her all in all—and although her first home may be tenderly remembered, her new one is dearest whatever it may be—for it is *his*, and she is by his side. But alas! the case we now record is one of marriage without love, and truly this is ever a fearful experiment—an awful risk! We do see such unions sometimes turn out well—even happily. Time and custom—intrinsic worth will do its work of attaching a heart; but it is an unnatural—nay, if rightly considered, a sinful act—and it is our opinion, that however convenience may promote, or rank or fortune adorn a marriage—without real *bona fide* love—as its basis—no lesser power—no mortal agency, can turn the bitter waters of this world's trials into wine.

Lena, little used to muse and droop in solitary sadness, could bear the silence that reigned around no longer, and was about to ring for her maid—but just at that moment she heard a low knock, and the door of the apartment softly open. She started into a sitting posture, and looking round saw her three sisters-in-law advancing cautiously towards her. Ere she could rise they were close to her, and kneeling before her the girls embraced the young bride by turns, looking upon her with mingled pity, kindness and interest, as she sat in the firelight, her hair, disarranged by her reclining position, drooping around her face, which was pale with sadness and fatigue.

"We thought perhaps you might like to see us, and would think it strange that we did not appear to welcome you," the eldest said, when Lena, gently smiling, expressed her pleasure at seeing them, and expressed how kind she thought it in them, having thus come to her.

"But you know," Rachel continued, "we are not quite our own mistresses, and have only now slipped in here for a very few minutes, having ascertained that Lady Rachel is safely closeted with Lionel till the dressing-bell rings."

"But I hope you will be allowed constantly to come and see me without any concealment," Lena said—"I trust indeed we shall be a great deal together; your mother will not surely object to your coming to see me."

The two elder girls shrugged their shoulders, with a doubtful expression. The youngest stood timidly aloof and shook her head, sadly regarding her young sis-

ter-in-law with quiet but earnest interest and admiration.

"Poor Agnes!" the sisters said, "you must not say, if you please, that you have seen her yet. We do not mind it much—we have no idea of being any longer kept shut up like children afraid to move. She is under school-room discipline; and since her unfortunate visit to the Duchess, the reins are held tighter than ever."

Lena, who had heard something of the shrubbery adventure, which Lady Rachel had communicated to Mr. Beauchamp, glanced instinctively at the offender, and beheld her face cast down and crimsoned with confusion.

"I shall see you all this evening?" said Lena, wishing to turn the subject.

"Oh yes! Rachel and I shall enact the part of two dummies at the dinner-table," Amelia answered; "as for poor Agnes, you will be paraded up to see her to-morrow, I suppose, but nothing will be expected from you but an embrace of cold propriety; so you need not be afraid of betraying, by too little warmth, that it is not a first meeting."

Lena looked puzzled and distressed; all these crooked dealings were so new and strange to her.

"I know you will be our friend," the eldest continued, "and do what you can with our brother to make our lives more supportable; Lionel is inclined to be kind to us, but then he requires to be well managed. Above all," she added, laughing, "you must take care not to seem too anxious about us, or too good-naturedly partial; that will send him at once over to the enemy—begging Lady Rachel's pardon for thus naming her."

Poor Lena!—her eyes opened still wider with bewilderment, not unmixed with terror. She, since her birth, had only been amongst those, who were open as the broad daylight!—No back-stairs proceedings had she ever even heard of, amongst children and their parents—and now what a field seemed opening before her of dissimulation and manœuvre! Lena's heart sickened and revolted at the idea, and she endeavoured to turn the conversation on other subjects, striving particularly to bring forward the youngest girl, towards whom she felt her heart incline with more particular interest.

The two eldest seemed to be made of sterner materials than the poor timid Agnes; their education of tyranny had done its work of hardening, in a degree, their natures—they were now buoyed up by the spirit of resistance, which was by this time burning fiercely in their hearts, against the despotism under which they existed, and a determination to endeavour to ame-

liorate their condition—or endure it no longer. But Agnes, younger, and by nature more gentle, looked as crushed and broken-spirited, as when Lena had first seen the poor girl creep into her presence seven years before.

The dressing-bell at length startled the party from the forgetful ease into which they were gradually sinking, and they all hurried away just in time to miss meeting Mr. Beauchamp, who on rejoining his young wife, expressed a hope that she had not been very dull during his absence.

Her spirits had somewhat rallied in the society of the girls. It had been a relief after the month's complete *tête-à-tête* with a companion, at the same time so devoted and *exigeant* as Mr. Beauchamp. She had often blamed herself as ungrateful for the weariness and oppression with which that devotion and care had begun to oppress her spirit; Lena now therefore was able to answer with more ready cheerfulness than she could have done half an hour before, that she had not been at all dull, for his sisters had paid her a visit. Mr. Beauchamp only remarked, that he should have imagined it better for Lena to have rested herself in quiet after her long journey, as she was to meet them at dinner. He then led her to her dressing-room, and returned after the *toilette* was completed to conduct her to the dining-room.

Lady Rachel followed, with the two Miss Beauchamps in her train. She took the head of the table, placing Lena by her side. Her Ladyship smiled graciously and with condescension as she took her seat, saying she was glad to welcome her son's wife to their board. Indeed, during the meal Lady Rachel was not wanting in kindly attentions; so that Lena, between her husband and mother-in-law, was scarcely suffered to rest unnoticed for a moment. As for the Miss Beauchamps, except when occasionally addressed by their brother, or by Lena, who made some timid efforts to draw them out to take their part in the conversation, they sat in silence; and certainly the reception their occasional speeches received was not encouraging, as they generally called forth some severe looks or comment from their mother.

Soon after retiring to the drawing-room, Agnes, escorted by a governess, entered. Lena embraced her, and then was informed by Lady Rachel that the young lady had been allowed on her account alone to spend the evening in their company—that it was not her *system* to bring her daughters forward till they were eighteen; nor had she found—and she looked with severe significance on poor Agnes—that any infringement of that rule had been attended with satisfactory results.

The frightened girl shrunk back to take her place at the work-table by the side of

the governess, where she and her sisters passed the evening in silence, or covert whispers occasionally carried on by the two eldest. Lena soon was joined by her husband, who sat by her side on the sofa, whilst he read the papers and his letters; Lady Rachel, with her tapestry work before her, conversing with him, chiefly on the subject of the company they were to receive during the following week. Thus passed the evening, slowly and wearily to poor Lena, who, what with bodily fatigue and the mental oppression which the *fine* and formality surrounding her served to increase, had scarcely energy to use her needle or to utter a word.

Her thoughts flew to her evenings at home—those periods of unmixed delight to the whole party, when they were all together—the more serious occupations of the day at an end—nothing required but to be happy and merry. How she missed the bright, joyous faces of her brothers and sisters—their ringing laugh and unrestrained prattle—her pleasant occupation of amusing her darling pet, the youngest boy, until the melancholy moment of bedtime came! Could she not in imagination see them all—even hear the clear melodious voices of Annie and Janet as they warbled their father's favourite songs—or the sound of the dance-inspiring tunes they rattled on the piano? Yes, she saw them all, poor girl, in fancy, as she sat in that great, grand, gloomy, silent room, peopled with such dismal spirits.

CHAPTER VII.

A. "Look on her. Is she not most beautiful?
Most happy, too? for rank, and youth, and health,
Are hers.

Can you foresee what earth
Has more to yield?"

B. "Methinks a 'more might be.'
HARRY CORNWALL.

THE next day a party composed of the best county families was expected to dine at Beauchamp Towers, and some of the guests were to remain all night.

They were assembled in order that Mrs. Beauchamp might be presented to her neighbours, and for the week succeeding, the house was thrown open to the company. Universal was the interest and admiration the gentle youthful bride attracted. So unassuming in her demeanour, it was hard to realize the idea that she was the rightful mistress of the stately mansion—yielding as she did all pre-eminent importance to her stately mother-in-law—meek as a child, yet sweetly winning in her manners.—she might have only appeared a more favoured younger daughter of the family, except indeed from that peculiarly vigilant

solicitude, which followed her every look—tracked her every movement.

"Mr. Beauchamp makes the most devoted of husbands," was the general remark, although some of the younger part of the company added,—"Almost too devoted to be agreeable."

For the pretty, gentle bride seemed ever fearful, without asking his leave, to stir even for a moment from his side, or bestow her attention on another when in his presence.

The two Miss Beauchamps made their appearance, but were never permitted to move beyond the boundary of their mother's observation; benefiting consequently little by the comparative liberty of a large party. They were handsome girls—the eldest striking in her appearance. It must have been not a little trying to their patience, to be cut off so completely from any communication with the gentlemen of the party; many of whom showed every inclination to make polite advances towards the young ladies of the house; but whom they soon found unapproachable, from the magic circle drawn around them by their formidable mother.

The Miss Beauchamps had each a fortune of thirty thousand pounds, and perhaps this circumstance was one of the reasons upon which Lady Rachel based her conduct towards her persecuted daughters; imagining that their pecuniary advantages might expose them to the advances of mercenary aspirants. For the better security of their persons in case of being occasionally obliged to remove her own eyes from the girls, Lady Rachel had installed as a sort of duenna, the head governess—an elderly person, who consequently made her appearance amongst the company, acting her part to perfection—as stern and stiff in appearance, as even her ladyship could desire, saying little, but seeing everything.

She had gone through truly a hardening furnace, poor Miss Ricketts—no wonder she issued forth from it the stiff moulded impenetrable metal of which she appeared composed. Sixteen years before, she had entered the family as a sort of nursery governess. A well educated but poverty-stricken individual, she soon discovered her only chance of securing her present situation, and the means of subsistence it afforded, was by fashioning herself after the wishes and ideas of Lady Rachel—steeling her heart against any particle of the softer feelings of her nature which might have stood in the way of the calling, decidedly marked out by her patroness.

Like the task-masters of Pharaoh, her heart seemed to harden with her employer's, enabling her unrelentingly to follow the increasing requirements of her position, to draw tighter and tighter the bands

of school-room discipline and bondage, according as her pupils advanced in years and decreased in passive humility and obedience. The two elder girls, though comparatively out of school-room domination, hated her as prisoners loathe their unrelenting jailor. But Agnes, though to all appearance owing her no more of love than the others—perhaps on the same principle as a dog attaches itself to the master who chastises it—seemed as if to cling with something like attachment and a sense of protection, to her severe and sinister-looking Cerberus.

The week of entertainment at an end, the household relapsed into its regular routine; and the bride settled down into the quiet and uniformity of domestic life—unbroken save by the dinner visits they were called upon to accept, in return for the hospitality the neighbours had received from Beauchamp Towers. The domestic course of life upon which Lena started, differed entirely from that which generally awaits a young wife's first entrance into the state of matrimony.

There was in her case none of the excitement and sense of importance generally attendant on stepping into the new post of mistress of an establishment—an event, be it of a cottage or a palace, ever bringing with it some feeling of pleasurable pride to a young housekeeper's heart. But Lena found herself merely admitted a member of a household as an honoured guest rather than a mistress—everything arranged and prepared—nothing left either to desire or command. Hers was however not the disposition to cavil at this; even in thought: submissively and contentedly Lena conformed to the appointed character she was expected to fill in her new position.

That character seemed evidently to be wife to Mr. Beauchamp—nothing else. She was to be of no use either as mistress of a family, or occasional companion to her sisters-in-law; her husband appearing determined by his constant devotion to leave her no plea for desiring any other occupation or companionship. Their mornings were spent together in reading and writing; afterwards—weather permitting—walking, riding or driving. Their evenings on the model of the first passed at Beauchamp Towers—save that music was sometimes introduced, rendering their tediousness more supportable.

Lena received weekly letters from her family, their arrivals constituting her greatest delight. Not so much pleasure did she feel in replying to them, for she felt her answers to be unsatisfactory and constrained, not the spontaneous effusions of her heart. This perhaps happened because her husband was near her when she wrote, and she knew, generally expected

that she would offer the letter when finished for his perusal. And of facts she had little to relate, after she had once made her family *au fait* with the programme of her existence—the books and work with which she was engaged! She had little familiar intercourse with her sisters-in-law; when her husband was forced by business to absent himself for some hours during the day, Lady Rachel took his place as her companion in her drives—and if on such occasions her sisters-in-law were allowed to visit her in her apartments, Miss Ricketts was of the party, and sat, whilst they read together some most dry abstruse work chosen by that lady herself. It seemed next to impossible that anything like excitement or rebellion could disturb the strict discipline which regulated the movements of the inmates of the Towers; any outburst of impatience on the part of the girls would have appeared to Lena, as startling and momentous a crisis as a prison mutiny—yet from hints she had received, she surmised that such things were not of unheard of occurrence.

The first emotions of marked pleasure or pain produced in the young wife's breast, by any particular event since her arrival at Beauchamp Towers, were elicited on the following occasion. She one day received a letter from her brother Alick, announcing that his regiment had changed its quarters from Scotland to England, and proposing that he should visit his dear sister, to make up for his great disappointment in having failed to obtain leave to attend her wedding.

The prospect of seeing this best loved brother was, as may be imagined, a source of great delight, and with that feeling sparkling in her face, Lena laid the letter before her husband, to receive his sympathy and expressions of gratification at the expected pleasure. It came not as unhesitatingly as she would have imagined; and then he said he would defer his answer, as it required further consideration.

At first Lena deemed this manner of proceeding but a part of her husband's natural manner; a sort of tiresome way which he had of conferring a favour. She had little idea, poor girl! that one of the greatest delights her fancy contemplated, indeed the hope which had sustained her in this her new and very different existence—the free admission of her family into her home—was so early to be put under restriction. Sharp was the pain which struck upon her heart, when kindly—but firmly, her husband in the evening began to speak upon the subject of the letter—informing her that it was his intention to take her to London in the spring—that there it would be quite certain she would see her brother, as his regiment was

at Hounslow, adding he would therefore prefer her writing, to postpone the pleasure of meeting him till that period.

"I must own," Mr. Beauchamp said, "that I incline towards my mother's scruples upon the subject of admitting a young man into our domestic circle on such familiar terms as a visit in a country house from your brother must entail—on account of my sisters, these objections arise."

Poor Lena was thunderstruck, and could not conceal her dismay and disappointment. What! write and tell dear Alick—that brother so peculiarly sensitive in his feelings—so like herself in heart and disposition—who she knew would feel *hurt*, rather than angry and provoked, as Gerald would perhaps have been—write and tell him that he must not come—that she could not receive him in her own house!—the very idea was heart-breaking.

"Lionel!" she faltered through the rising tears which well nigh choked her utterance, "Alick might spend his time entirely with us—he need only stay a very few days—and never even see your sisters, if Lady Rachel object to that. But what harm could ensue even if they were thrown together? Dear Alick," she added in a tone of slightly injured feeling, "will care to speak to none but me whilst he is here."

Mr. Beauchamp looked and felt sorry, and annoyed at witnessing his gentle wife's distress; but was perhaps only the more reconciled to his determination on perceiving the too earnest desire which this unusual excitement manifested for the society of another.

"I never interfere with my mother's ideas and scruples with regard to my sisters, Lena," he continued: "whilst they are in my house I feel it my duty not to disregard Lady Rachel's wishes. I trust there may be many future opportunities of receiving your brother at the Towers, either in the absence of my mother and sisters—an event which sometimes occurs—or amongst the other guests to whom the house is occasionally thrown open."

Finally Mr. Beauchamp concluded by reminding poor Lena in a tone of mild reproach, that in these their first months of married life, it was soon for her to begin to long so earnestly for other society save that of her husband; adding that it grieved him to think she could not be content to wait patiently a few weeks, to behold a brother, when she had himself by her side.

"It is not flattering to your husband, dear Lena, I confess, to wish to have our private intercourse thus early disturbed. Your attention divided so completely, would be to me insupportable."

"Well!" said Lena, with a heavy sigh, "I will write to him, of course, if his coming is not agreeable to you."

The sister's heart was too full to let her pursue the subject.

CHAPTER VIII.

—That continuous sweetness, which with ease
Pleases all round it, from the wish to please.
This was the charm that Annie's smile bestowed,
The wave's fresh ripple from deep fountains flow'd.
Below, exhaustless gratitude—above,
Woman's meek temper—childhood's ready love.
THE NEW TIMON.

THE spring following found the Camerons established in Ireland, the General inhabiting a commodious residence close to the town of Athlone.

The family were all prosperous and contented. To the young ones, the novelty of the existence in itself was happiness, and all around was seen through the medium of *couleur de rose*. Though the daughters of an officer of high rank, the girls had seen little of military life, since they were quite children. The gaiety and stir therefore of a garrison town, was constant interest and amusement.

Mrs. Cameron, though her second daughter was but sixteen, began now to plot for her. There was an Irish unmarried Earl in the neighbourhood, and there was young Lord Alfred Townshend in the Hussars. Annie was still completely childish and simple in heart and manner; but it was this, joined to an evident superiority of sense and intellect, which rendered her the most fascinating little creature in the world.

And Mrs. Cameron appreciated these attractions only too fully, and felt it very difficult to resist the pleasure and pride of having Annie as her *aid-de-camp* at her parties, as she would laughingly style the bright-eyed little beauty; and though the General would talk seriously and reprehensively on the subject, a few kisses and a little coaxing from his favourite child, would stop his mouth, and reluctantly change his frowns into smiles.

The General having permission to attach a son to his military staff, Gerald Cameron gazetted into a good Infantry regiment about the same time, and acted in the capacity of *aid-de-camp* to his father for a few months. During this period, however, the General had discovered the expediency of making some change in these arrangements. He saw that the ease and indulgence of such home service was injurious to the peculiar character of Gerald, and likely to prove prejudicial to the habits of industry and good discipline so essential in a soldier; the father therefore decided that his son should join his regiment, which had about eighteen months' foreign service to complete at Gibraltar, the young man being far from

reluctant to embark upon the enlarged sphere which would thus be given to his experience of the world and his profession.

The plan being communicated to the Camerons' kind friends, the Duke and Duchess of Stratheden, a request was made by them, with which it was most grateful to the General's feelings to be able immediately to comply. It was that he should appoint as *aid-de-camp* in Gerald's stead, a young man of the name of Mildmay, who was about to join the — Hussars, quartered at ——. He was a connexion of the Duchess, and the son of a particular friend.

The young cornet, therefore, immediately after his arrival at Athlone, was presented to the General and attached to his staff. General Cameron was much pleased with the gentlemanly bearing of the new *aid-de-camp*. He was exactly the sort of person he would have chosen from amongst a hundred other young men, more striking and showy in their appearance; for there was something peculiarly and irresistibly gentlemanlike in his person and deportment, giving at once the assurance that in every capacity, private or public, he was sure to bear himself with credit and propriety. Perhaps it would be no less favourable to the young man in the General's eyes, as his thoughts glanced towards his pretty daughters, that certainly the new *aid-de-camp* was by no means, what could be called handsome.

He was not above one-and-twenty—rather below the middle stature—delicate in appearance, but interesting in face and features, as well as in manner and demeanour; and as we before said, most strikingly gentlemanlike. The first time he joined the dinner party at the General's, it chanced to be Annie's birthday, which formed a legitimate excuse for her being admitted as one of the party. She was introduced to Mr. Mildmay just as dinner was announced, and he offered his arm to conduct her to the dining-room. She sat at the bottom of the table between her new acquaintance and her father, who joined in the cheerful, unrestrained conversation. Annie never chattered more freely—her eyes never sparkled more merrily, and never had a long dinner, in her experience, passed so quickly, or agreeably. And Frank Mildmay, on his part, showed no symptom of thinking otherwise; indeed, during the continuation of the agreeable meal, he felt only that he was looking on the brightest, and most bewitching little face he had ever beheld, was seated by the most fascinating creature in the world; whose presence not a little heightened the relish of the excellent fare—and capital champagne. And what more

can or does a young officer ever require to make "a dinner" one of the most agreeable hours in the day?

In the evening, all the children were permitted to sit up to a later hour than usual, and the officers, many of whom had become, through the cheerful hospitality of General and Mrs. Cameron, quite domesticated in the family, and on intimate terms with the young people, begged for them a little dancing; Janet and Minny being, as well as Annie, perfect little sylphides in that art.

So Mrs. Cameron sat down to play for the dancers, and there was a laughing arrangement proposed by Lord Alfred Townshend, that on this occasion the usual forms should be reversed, and that the ladies should select their own partners—of course, the queen of the day taking precedence in the choice; and his Lordship twisted his dark moustaches with an amused smile lurking in his eye, as he watched the pretty Annie stand irresolute for an instant after her first gay laughing exclamation against such an arrangement, with colour raised and eyes most beautifully shy.

Comfortably assured was his Lordship, towards whom the little beauty's choice would no doubt incline, and he was about to presume on his right of precedence in rank to relieve her of any modest scruples, and second her supposed wishes, by gaily advancing to offer himself as her cavalier, when, with a sudden, gazelle-like spring forward, Annie passed his Lordship, and presented her hand with a frank, unaffected smile, to Frank Mildmay.

This act might have arisen from a slight impulse of coquettish contrariety, or, as indeed it appeared, from kind civility towards the least familiar of the guests. But Frank Mildmay paused not to consider why or whence the action flowed; he only looked and felt charmed and flattered as he ought to be; whilst Lord Alfred turned towards Mrs. Cameron with a shrug, and a smile of good-natured discomfiture, and suffered himself to be monopolized by Minny, the youngest daughter, whom he was soon swinging gaily round, following his young subaltern, and fairy-footed partner.

The busy imagination of Mrs. Cameron was soon engaged in building castles—founded on an idea which now pierced her brain—that there had been something more of real than mock pique and discomfiture in the glance of her favourite Lord Alfred, when Annie had chosen another for her partner in the waltz; and then came the sobering reflection, that Annie was too young to be loved and wooed by the Marquis's brother, who, though not heir to the title, possessed advantages sufficient to render him not unworthy—even of Annie!

Therefore, the ambitious mother followed with her eyes, the pretty pair of waltzers, thinking little however of young Mildmay except that she rejoiced that her beautiful child had found a partner, who served to show off to such great advantage the dancing of the graceful girl, whose movements she was not slow to perceive, were followed with much interest by Lord Alfred; and with her mind's eye fixed on one object—one desire alone engrossing her thoughts—Mrs. Cameron witnessed without heed or annoyance many such dances—many such traits of Annie's kindness to, and preference of, the young *aid-de-camp*. Frank Mildmay became quite a child of the family, but there was also always Lord Alfred with his dazzling appearance and handsome person, to eclipse and overshadow him in Mrs. Cameron's eyes—and of course, she concluded, in Annie's also.

CHAPTER IX.

"The rose grows on her cheek: is there no thorn?"
BARRY CORNWALL.

ON passing through London on the eve of embarkation, Gerald Cameron was gladly met by Alick—his brother shadow—as the former was wont laughingly to denominate him; for though in form and nature the twin brothers were the "whole matter and copy" one of the other, Alick, both as to size and colouring, was a softer, more delicate type of the manly-looking Gerald; he might have seemed almost a spiritualized edition to that of the—in all respects—more earthly brother.

"And Lena—I am longing to see her—poor little darling!" was Gerald's exclamation, ere he had passed ten minutes in his brother's society at the hotel which had been their *rendezvous*—"Come with me, Alick, there's a good fellow, to Belgrave Square—I suppose you are a pretty constant visiter there. How do you get on with Beauchamp and the delectable Lady Rachel?"

"Oh, I have not much to do with her Ladyship," Alick replied; "I am an occasional guest at their state dinners, but then of course I can expect nothing more than the 'how do you do,' and 'I hope you are well, Mr. Cameron,' with which I am honoured, and which is quite sufficient for me, I assure you," added he in a tone of some *hautcur*.

"But, good gracious!" exclaimed Gerald "do you never dine there, in a sociable manner? Are you not quite at home in the house of your sister?"

"I have dined there once or twice when Lady Rachel and her daughters were out, *tete-a-tete* with Beauchamp and Lena; but if you mean, do I often have

our sister's society as I should like," he continued seriously, "and can enjoy a good hour's unrestrained chat with her, that is quite out of the question—her husband scarcely leaves her, I believe, morning noon or night, and I can see plainly is not fond of interlopers."

"Is the fellow not civil?" interrupted Gerald, firing up indignantly.

"Not civil!" his brother replied, "I did not mean to imply that; had I experienced the reverse, I should have taken pretty good care to make myself scarce—No! Beauchamp is civility itself; but then you know there is something more than civility required; to make one feel at ease in another person's house."

"And Lena?" anxiously asked Gerald.

"Oh, she, dear girl, often reproaches me for going so seldom to Belgrave Square; but I fancy she cannot have much enjoyment of my visits, or I would sacrifice every feeling of my own for her sake."

"Yes, by heaven!" cried the impetuous Gerald, "I should not be scrupulous when my own sister was in the case—I consider that I have some right to consult her inclination as well as that of her selfish husband—come, let us be off—I suppose they cannot do less than invite me to dine, and if they do, I'll put up with no nonsense, but enjoy Lena's society without caring a straw for any of them. By the bye, do you ever see that poor little frightened Agnes Beauchamp?"

"Agnes—oh! that is the youngest—no; I should never have known that such a being existed in the house. The eldest is a handsome girl, and appears kindly and agreeably disposed towards me; but neither she nor her sister are allowed to speak or act beyond the most formal limits of civility marked out by Lady Rachel."

"But Agnes," persisted Gerald, "you do not mean that she is never allowed to show?—poor wretch! and she is a pretty little creature too; and rather a sly one, if I am not mistaken. Did you ever hear of the shrubbery walk? I declare I'll try and hunt her out, if it be only to spite that old griffin Lady Rachel. I am going to leave the country, so it will not signify much making her my sworn enemy."

"Except for Lena's sake, Gerald—you had better not do anything to make Beauchamp or her Ladyship more shy of her relations than—than they seem inclined to be," was Alick's now really concerned rejoinder.

"But Alick, my father and mother do not suspect how matters stand, I think—although they did complain sometimes, that you were not sufficiently circumstantial with regard to your accounts of Lena."

"I thought it of no use to make them uncomfortable on the subject; particularly as Lena does not seem herself to have any

idea that she has reason or right to complain, though she cannot, dear girl, but mark the difference between everything about her, from that to which she has ever been accustomed."

The brothers were silent during the remainder of the walk. They both felt a weight upon their spirits, when they thought upon the dearly loved sister they were about to see, with a doubt as to her happiness, which was a sharp pang to their affectionate hearts.

On inquiring in Belgrave Square for Mrs. Beauchamp, they were shown into the receiving drawing-room, which was vacant on their entrance, but in less than the five minutes employed in transferring the announcement of their arrival from one servant to another, till it reached Mr. Beauchamp's own footman, a light, hurried step was heard in the ante-room, the door flew open which was as hastily but carefully closed, and Lena with a bright, fresh kindled glow lighting up her fair face and beautiful eyes, cast one delighted gaze upon them, as if to assure herself that the pleasure were indeed a reality, and then threw herself into Gerald's open arms, receiving his warm embraces with the clinging, gentle gratification of an affectionate child.

"Such a fine lady! I declare I am almost afraid to touch her!" Gerald at length said, as after having exhausted his first fervour, he held his lovely sister at arm's length and gazed upon her richly, fashionably attired form, with playful wonder and admiration. "But these are the same as ever," he added, as he stroked the long fair ringlets, which in beautiful disorder were flowing around her shoulders.

Lena laughed and blushed, then disengaging herself from Gerald, turned affectionately but with a chastened joy to embrace her other brother.

"Dear Alick," she said, "I have not seen you for many days;" and she looked not reproachfully, but with somewhat of timid inquiry into his face.

He made some not very satisfactory excuse. Seating herself between the two brothers, she began her eager questionings about the dear ones from whom Gerald had so lately come—her cheeks varying from pale to red, and from red to pale; her eyes now smiling—now suffusing tearfully as she listened to the lively, graphic touches, by which he brought them all before her.

"And now let me hear something of yourself and your concerns," Gerald broke off, after having with tolerable patience indulged her for more than half an hour with desultory information. "How do you get on? You look well; rather paler than when you first came into the room, I think, but as fair and beautiful a lady as ever."

your husband quite well, I hope, and Lady Rachel and the Miss Beauchamps—Miss Agnes in particular? *She* is my friend. How do you like them all?"

The peaceful enjoyment of Lena's countenance was now clouded by a slight shade of disquiet, and by the glance of her eye towards the door, it was evident her thoughts were suddenly carried further than that apartment and its occupants.

She started—the colour rising to her face, as, in the act of replying in some sort to the question last addressed to her, the door opened abruptly, and Mr. Beauchamp made his appearance.

He noticed, but by a cold scarce perceptible glance, the two young Camerons, from whom she hastily disengaged her hands, and rose with them.

"I thought I should have found you ready," he said, "the carriage has been at the door several minutes."

"My brothers!" said Lena, in a slightly nervous tone, and then Mr. Beauchamp shook hands, and said he was glad to see them.

"Gerald only stays till to-morrow, he is on his way for embarkation," Lena suggested, looking at her husband with the wish doubtless to postpone the intended drive, for which he had returned, after an hour's absence, to accompany her.

"It is unfortunate then that you are engaged to dinner, or we might have had the pleasure of his company this evening," said Mr. Beauchamp.

"How very unfortunate, indeed!" sighed Lena; "is there no possibility of my staying at home?"

"My dear Lena," exclaimed Mr. Beauchamp, in a tone of as much surprise and deprecation, as if she had proposed something most preposterous. "How can you think of such a thing?"

Lena never argued a point. She looked resigned but still grieved.

Gerald said, "Oh never mind! I can come and spend to-morrow morning with you;" and he showed himself ready to depart, for he saw by Mr. Beauchamp's fidgety looks, that the waiting horses were in his thoughts. And Alick, too, began to look impatient for a move.

"I will not detain you any longer from your drive," Gerald said; but Lena still lingering, held his hand and cast a wistful glance from him to her husband, which he answered by saying to the young man—

"You will not think your sister in good looks if you judge by her appearance this morning. I never saw you look so pale and ill, Lena—I must beg you to dress yourself directly for driving—after your fatiguing morning with the mantua-maker, and this unexpected interruption of the hour of rest I had left you to take, you will not be fit for anything to-night, if you

do not get into the fresh air, and enjoy the quiet of a drive."

"Perhaps we shall meet you this evening, Lena," Alick interposed; "I suppose you are to be at Lady ——'s Ball. I have an invitation, and shall procure one for Gerald."

Lena looked inquiringly at her husband.

"If your sister be not too much fatigued," Mr. Beauchamp answered for her; "but just now she must not be allowed to do too much," he added mysteriously.

Lena, revived by the new hope thus afforded, would not try his patience, or rather provoke another irritable glance towards the door, but with a gayer smile said.

"Oh, I shall be so fresh and strong after our drive, Lionel!"

She again hurriedly pressed her brother's hand, and was going hastily away, but when at the door, turned and said,

"Oh! do stay and see us off, Gerald, with my beautiful ponies!"

And Gerald began to hope that his sister *was* happy—so easily are the young and thoughtless satisfied on the score of happiness; a smile—a few gay, careless words are enough to re-assure them that, for the time being at least, happiness must exist.

The young men went to the hall door with Mr. Beauchamp, but Alick remembering that business required his immediate attendance, made an appointment with Gerald to meet elsewhere, and walked off. The prettiest appointed phaeton and ponies, with attendant outriders, stood at the door in expectation of Mrs. Beauchamp's appearance. Mr. Beauchamp had approached to make some alteration in the trappings, and Gerald stood looking on, when an equipage, drawn by a pair of heavy, slow-paced horses, was seen approaching in all the pompous state of peruked coachman and powdered footman, to which the phaeton immediately gave place.

The steps were let down, and the high and mighty Lady Rachel descended from the coach followed by her two eldest daughters. They had just returned from the airing, it was her ladyship's usual custom to complete at this early hour—just the moment when the most amusing time for driving was about to commence.

Gerald took off his hat and stepped aside to allow her Ladyship to pass, who at first sight doubtless supposed him to be his brother. In another instant she perceived the difference between the careless, easy, saucy Gerald's bow, and the retiring *hauteur* of Alick. Whether or not in consequence of this discovery—her Ladyship having most coldly and formally bent her head—she turned her steps back,

and peremptorily motioned her daughters to precede her, just in time to catch the eldest in the very act of nodding her head—not ungraciously—in answer to the salutation which Gerald had then transferred to the young lady—whilst Amelia was, with curious, puzzled glance, attempting to discover whether it were really the shy, quiet Mr. Alick Cameron, who was looking so very delightfully gay, and saucy, even, in the very face of her mother.

But the two girls were compelled to pass quickly on, daring to cast no backward glances on the young man—Lady Rachel close at their heels—and Gerald, having watched them disappear, with an amused expression hovering on his countenance, was soon joined by Lena, looking most lovely in her tasteful carriage dress, and he had the pleasure of placing her by the side of her husband in an equipage as well suited to her pretty person, as Lady Rachel's heavy ostentatious vehicle seemed illustrative of her high and mighty appearance.

Gerald remained a few minutes by his sister's side admiring the ponies; but Mr. Beauchamp, with his whip half raised, was evidently only in civility awaiting the completion of the compliments as he sat stiffly back.

"Well, I will not detain you any longer," said Gerald, "*au revoir*, Lena—to Hyde Park of course."

"Oh no!" Mr. Beauchamp coldly replied, "that is too gay for us quiet people," and wheeling round he drove off in the direction of Chelsea.

"Quiet people! Slow, selfish prig!" was Gerald's inward ejaculation, "the idea of taking that beautifully dressed creature off to be covered with dust on the high-road, that he may have her all to himself."

And again, by as hasty a conclusion as that by which he had dubbed his sister—"happy," the young man feared it could not be so well with his darling sister.

CHAPTER X.

"The simple wreath of woodbine flowers
Is taken from her brow,
But yet she sighs for by-gone hours—
Can she be happy now?"

CARPENTER.

The young Camerons went early to the ball in the expectation of again meeting their sister, and they were not disappointed, for she soon entered the room, looking most beautiful, leaning on her husband's arm.

Lady Rachel and her daughters were also there—the young ladies standing unmoveably one on each side of their lady mother, except when temporarily released

by the quadrille, for which they were suffered to accept the partners approved by her ladyship.

"Is not that your sister?" said a tall young man, in a low, earnest tone to Alick Cameron on the Beauchamps' entrance.

"Yes, Sackville," answered the latter. "I fancied you were acquainted with her."

The young man did not reply, save by a low sigh. Seeing the brothers moving towards the spot where Lena stood, he advanced also instinctively towards her, but when close to her merely passed on with a formal bow.

"Who is that, Lena?" Mr. Beauchamp inquired.

"Oh! that is Mr. Sackville, Lionel. Do you not remember," she added with a blush, "seeing him when our carriage was stopped by the accident on the day of—"

"Oh! yes, I remember that *mal-a-propos rencontre*. Rather an awkward moment," Mr. Beauchamp added with an equivocal smile, addressing Gerald, who had taken possession of Lena's unoccupied side.

"What! you met Sackville on your wedding tour, Lena?" Gerald laughingly exclaimed; "ah! I remember, the Duchess of Stratheden did tell us something of the sort, that she had heard from his mother—some romantic adventure which had befallen her poetical son—a narrow lane—a broken wheel—bride bathed in tears!"

The music did not allow Mr. Beauchamp very clearly to hear all Gerald's thoughtless nonsense, but he was not fond of joking at any time, particularly if the subject were at all connected with himself or his wife; and he would have drawn her on, but Gerald pertinaciously kept by their side.

"Do you dance now, Lena?" he inquired.

"No!" she answered, and Mr. Beauchamp looked his disgust at the question.

"Will you allow me, then, Mr. Beauchamp, to set you at liberty, and take charge of your lady for a time?" Gerald said.

"Do you not dance, Mr. Cameron?" Mr. Beauchamp coldly inquired.

"I should certainly prefer my sister's society, considering that I am on the eve of leaving the country," Gerald as coldly replied; and Mr. Beauchamp having glanced at Lena's countenance and seen there expressed nought but ill-disguised support of her brother's wishes, dropped her arm and silently withdrew.

"My dear Lena, you must not allow your husband to get into the habit of for ever sticking to your side. It is a most troublesome custom both for yourself and all your relations and friends. I assure you Alick complains bitterly of your unapproachability—of never being able to

have an hour's comfortable talk with you," said Gerald.

Poor Lena looked distressed and half surprised; for it was the first time that the ideas which had begun to suggest themselves vaguely to her mind, were brought in a decided form before her. The full perception of the sad, disagreeable truth her brother's plain words conveyed, had not yet been fully understood. Meek, submissive and inexperienced, it was hard for her to realize to her mind, and rightly to comprehend, the strange spirits amongst which she found herself domesticated.

Gerald would not vex her gentle spirit by pursuing further the subject. Alick joined them, and with a sad, beseeching smile Lena invited him to take his seat on her other side, on the bench where they had placed themselves.

"How delightful it is to have you both with me again!" Lena said, looking from one to another with fond affection; almost forgetting they were not the only people in the room.

The reunited trio, absorbed in each other, sat talking happily some little time. They were not so unobserved, as unobserved.

The interesting appearance of the three young creatures, and the striking likeness each bore to the other, plainly told their relative positions, and drew upon them many a remark and many a glance, Lena being of course the prominent feature of interest to the male portion of the lookers on.

"Lena, shall I ask one of the Miss Beauchamps to dance?" Gerald at length demanded; "good Heavens, what a look I caught just now from Lady Rachel! By the bye, when is that poor little Agnes to be liberated? We had such an affair down at Beechy—I should like to have another peep at her, poor little thing—does she ever mention me?"

"No," answered Lena.

"Oh, but she is a sly one," he continued; "and I mean to run away with her; some of these days."

"Hush, dear Gerald," his sister murmured.

"Oh, I hope you are not afraid of that old cat. Here, Sackville!" exclaimed the thoughtless Gerald, as he saw the young man hovering near; "come and tell us the story of the broken wheel, fainting bride, and swearing bridegroom."

"Oh fie, Gerald!" interrupted Lena, blushing and smiling; "there was no broken wheel, only broken traces; I was not fainting, nor was I even frightened; and Mr. Beauchamp never swears."

Her brothers laughed; Mr. Sackville smiled, and strove to interpose some careless words on the subject; and then Lena and he began to converse as easily

as they might have done a year ago; but in the midst of this pleasant talk she happened to raise her eyes, and saw, immediately opposite, her turbaned mother-in-law, whose gaze was fixed upon her with not the gentlest or most agreeable expression. She was speaking at the same time with curling lip to Mr. Beauchamp, and Lena felt her hour of freedom had passed, which was but too true.

Mr. Beauchamp approached his wife and held out his arm, saying, abruptly,

"Come, my dear, I shall order the carriage round immediately; so we had better go down stairs."

Lena rose, but looked rather anxiously on her husband's clouded countenance; scarcely giving her time to take leave of Gerald, he led her away.

"Good bye, Lena, I shall see you tomorrow," Gerald called after her, whilst Sackville turned away sadly.

"A cavalier sort of a husband, that!" soliloquized Gerald; "but this last act was all my Lady's doing. I watched her putting Beauchamp up to it; but I'll be quit with her." And immediately stepping forward, he arrested the steps of Rachel Beauchamp—whom he saw at that moment returning on a partner's arm towards her mother—and asked her hand for the next dance.

"The next quadrille, with pleasure," she answered.

"Nonsense! Quadrille?—the next waltz!" Gerald answered, sufficiently loud to reach the ears of Lady Rachel.

Miss Beauchamp shook her head with an understanding smile, and rejoined her mother. Gerald begged to be introduced to Miss Amelia, in order that he might have the pleasure of dancing with her in the course of the evening, and then left them to the mercy of Lady Rachel's thundering looks, to waltz with a partner introduced to him by Alick.

On his return to claim Miss Beauchamp's hand for the quadrille, he found her engaged in an evident contention in his cause; for a sheepish, extremely plain-looking youth, was retreating from the ground, rejected as her partner—and Rachel Beauchamp, with rather irreverent impatience, stood enduring the suppressed tirade which Lady Rachel, with looks calculated to annihilate the tormented girl, was pouring into her ear.

The young man she had rejected was a *parti*.

"Well! madam, would you have me insult Mr. Gerald Cameron by dancing with another person when I was engaged to him?" said Rachel.

"I care not if you were to insult him, and the whole tribe," was her ladyship's flattering rejoinder.

"Miss Beauchamp, may I have the

pleasure?" and both looking up saw Gerald at their side, but with a countenance perfectly unmoved and unabashed, although he had heard every word of Lady Rachel's speech. He presented his arm to her daughter, and led her off to the dance.

"I wish Mr. Alick Cameron would ask me to dance," muttered Amelia, disconsolately; with a wistful glance towards the young officer, who passed them carelessly at that moment, with no idea of the sort in his thoughts.

"I must say I cannot complain of the trouble given to me by my second daughter's numerous partners," Lady Rachel sneeringly observed, in allusion to poor Amelia's *cavaliers*, that evening, having been few and far between. "This is certainly an unsatisfactory mode of proceeding, and it will be the last London season which I shall give myself the trouble and annoyance of encountering."

Amelia yawned and thought that so it might be, as far as any pleasure it had afforded her. The back stairs tricks and contrivances at the towers she began to think were better fun and quite as profitable as the *gene* and mortification of a London campaign under such chaperonage; and with sullen, apathetic looks she suffered herself to be dragged on by her mother to a more convenient position for watching the movements of Rachel and her partner.

This object in part obtained, served but to increase the fidgety impatience of Lady Rachel, also the envy and interest of her companion; for from the prudent foresight of the offending couple, the situation in the quadrille they had chosen only afforded distant and occasional glimpses of their proceedings. Sufficient, however, did Lady Rachel see to raise her suspicions that something more than the few remarks of a ball-room was passing between them; treason, mischief, must be hatching amidst those "gibes and jests," and then that earnest converse, which soon seemed to engross them.

But when the music ceased, and instead of the immediate re-appearance which Lady Rachel's daughters were expected to make by her side, the pair vanished from before her eyes, and when even some five minutes had elapsed and no Rachel returned, the lady mother being informed with some malice, by an acquaintance, that her truant daughter was down stairs in the refreshment room eating ices, her irritation became past endurance; so demanding the escort of an ancient *beau*, she descended the stairs in search of the culprit, and found the young people as described, their heads close together in the enjoyment of deeply interesting discourse; so completely engrossed

indeed that they were not aware of the awful approach till Rachel started round in affright; having received a smart tap on her shoulder from her mother's fan.

Miss Beauchamp, with resigned *insouciance*—so experienced was she in such scenes—prepared to yield herself to the mercy of her captor, whilst Gerald assailed her ladyship with such a fire of officious civility in the way of proffers of ices and cooling beverages, that it was some time before she was able to shake him off and disengage herself from his malicious importunities, or make her daughter the peremptory command to follow her to the cloak-room.

"But, Miss Amelia—my quadrille!" Gerald exclaimed.

"My daughters dance no more to-night!" Lady Rachel sharply said and departed.

CHAPTER XI.

"I loved her when she looked from me,
And hid her stifled sighs:
I loved her, too, when she did smile
With shy and downcast eyes."

BARRY CORNWALL.

THE next morning when Gerald Cameron presented himself at an early hour in Belgrave Square, he was shown into the same drawing-room as on the preceding day. It was the room in which company was always received—a ceremony, he thought, which in this case might have been dispensed with, considering the visitor was but a brother to his sister.

"Mrs. Beauchamp had not yet finished her toilette," he was told. Throwing himself on a sofa, he said he was in no hurry, and could wait an hour if necessary.

But the young man's assumption of patience was not so genuine as he thus assumed, for when the servant had departed, he started up, threw down the book he had taken up, and an impatient listening demeanour overshadowed the expression of his countenance. For about ten minutes he heard nothing but the occasional shutting and opening of doors—nothing further transpired to interrupt his solitude.

"I wonder whether she will manage it," he murmured. "I hope so; it will be so capital; and really, I should like to see the poor young thing once more."

As he thus apostrophized, the door was opened abruptly, and there entered—or rather the tall slender figure of Agnes Beauchamp was pushed into the room by the shoulders; this act being performed by her elder sister Rachel, who said—

"Now don't be a goose, Agnes, but go and speak to Mr. Gerald Cameron; you are quite safe for ten minutes at least. I'll wait at this door, and Amelia has run

round to do the same at the other, and we can give you warning in due time if the enemy is in view."

So saying, Rachel shut the door, and left Agnes standing abashed and shrinking, as if she would fain have run out again; but Gerald approached her with extended hands:—

"Ah, Miss Agnes, I am delighted to see you. I did not like to leave the country without," Gerald added, as he drew her towards a seat. "I hope you did not come against your inclination, but that you wished also to see me."

"Oh no, it was not against my inclination," Agnes said, lifting up her eyes with more assurance; "I am sure I am very glad to see you; but—but this is all so silly, this pushing me into the room, and all this hurry; and I am such a figure—" she said, turning round pettishly, as she caught a sight of herself in a large mirror, "in my dowdy school-room clothes."

"A figure!—a very pretty figure, I am sure," Gerald observed, although her toilette was certainly not of the most *soignée* description. However, he thought that the common-looking dress did not destroy the pleasing effect of the young form it concealed, and that the dark hair carelessly twisted behind the little ear disfigured not the small pale face with its large black eyes; and as she smoothed her somewhat disordered tresses, the action only served to make the young man observe admiringly the thoroughbred form of the head and throat. He even could not quarrel with the faulty *chaussure*—although, like most of his sex, he was most particularly sensitive on that point—since the unsandalled slippers did not quite conceal that the feet they contained were slender and well-shaped. In fact, the months which had elapsed since the shrunken walk, although they seemed but to have accumulated upon the youthful countenance deeper marks of the wearisome oppression under which her spirit groaned, had also increased its interesting expression; and as Gerald thus regarded Agnes, the fun and malice which had chiefly urged him to seek this interview, began to yield to a softer and more serious feeling; and seeing her still look embarrassed and distressed, though she smiled at his compliments, some feeling of the same nature seemed to communicate itself to the young man, which for a moment checked his ease of look and manner.

There was a moment's pause, serving but to increase the confusion of Agnes; she turned away and wept. Gerald rallied himself. Recovering his presence of mind, he took her hand, kindly and respectfully, and said—

"Oh do not weep, dear Agnes; do not send me away so very far, miserable as I

shall be if this folly of your sister's and mine has cost you tears."

"If they find me out!" again Agnes murmured, as if anxious thus to account for these tears; "to you it will be nothing, who are going out of the country"—here her voice was again choked by sobs—"but I—"

"Well!" Gerald exclaimed soothingly, "do not, pray, weep so bitterly, my sweet Agnes; your sisters will take care that they do not find you out. But if they do, you do not care for a few more black looks and harsh words—you must be pretty well accustomed to such things by this time, I should think."

"Oh yes—and it is not that either which makes me weep, although it is not, certainly, very agreeable to be teased and railed at and punished like a child—even struck, as I have been, by my mother"—she added moodily.

"Good Heavens! you do not mean to say that your mother has ever lifted up her hand against you?" exclaimed Gerald, with indignant surprise painted on his countenance. After a moment's pause, he continued—"I wish I could take you off to Gibraltar with me—away from all these horrors, Agnes!"

The young girl lifted up her eyes with a quick, eager glance to Gerald's face.

"Would you like it, Agnes?" he inquired, as he marked with interest the expression his words had produced on his companion's countenance.

"Like it!" she exclaimed, passionately, extending her arms; "yes, anywhere!" But, ashamed and sorrowful, she added, "Anywhere to fly away and be at rest!"

Her head drooped upon her bosom as Gerald gazed on her in silence. At length he said, somewhat coldly—

"Then I presume, Agnes, you would not care whom you went off with, so you got away from home? I suppose any one would answer that purpose equally well who could manage it—as you do not care a straw for me. Is it not so?" and he tried to look into her face, which only sank lower and lower on her bosom.

"Now, I dare say," pursued Gerald, "you would as soon go off to Gibraltar with my brother Alick, if he were to ask you, or any one else;"—his earnestness seemed to increase with her confusion.

At these last words, Agnes looked quickly up, with an expression half petulant, half reproachful; her eyes swimming with indignant tears.

"No!" she exclaimed, "I don't know your brother—I have never seen him—never thought of him; how can I care for him, or any one else? How can I love any one—but—you—who have been so kind to me?" she murmured with crimson cheek, in a low, hurried, but earnest tone.

Gerald, without further hesitation, caught her in his arms, and pressed her slender trembling form to his heart.

"Well, is your interview over? I dare not let you stay much longer, for Lena will be very soon here now," interposed Rachel at that critical moment, as she suddenly opened the door and stepped in before them; Amelia from her post doing the same, in order to facilitate the flight of Agnes in case of the alarm which Rachel's warning foretold. Both girls stood gazing in no small surprise, and the eldest in no little dismay, at the scene which their abrupt intrusion had interrupted.

They certainly had no idea that the flirtation to which they had lent their aid was to be carried on so completely *con amore*. At the sound of the opening door, Gerald had partly released Agnes from his embrace, and she, panting and breathless, had turned a glance of terror towards it. But she was reassured on perceiving who were the intruders; and Gerald, careless of their presence, again approached Agnes, and in a low, hurried tone of voice, said, "Dear, dear girl, it cannot be now; I fear it would be impossible to manage it, for I am obliged to depart this very day; but depend upon it, I shall not be long away—as short a time as I possibly can manage—and then—then, when I come back—we will be happy, in spite of them all—trust me, dear Agnes, for that. Here," he continued, in a hurried manner, "take this in remembrance of this interview—as a pledge of my love—this ring; my mother gave it to me. Look at it whenever you are most miserable, and cheer yourself with the thought, that your troubles will soon have an end. And you—what will you give me?"

"What—what indeed?" gasped the agitated girl. "I have nothing—nothing."

"Yes! this will be most precious!" and Gerald, seizing a pair of scissors from an open workbox on the table, severed without mercy a long tress from her hair. "This is indeed a treasure!" he exclaimed, as he pressed it to his lips.

Rachel again interposed. "Agnes, you must really come now," she said; "I hear some one approaching;" and Agnes was dragged away between her two sisters.

"There, now, Agnes," they said, as they shut the bedroom door behind them, and Agnes seated herself upon the bed, bewildered and trembling, "you had better collect your ideas to reappear before Miss Ricketts; and we must take care, or Lady Rachel—"

Agnes started on her feet at the mention of her mother's name.

"Oh, I am sure you need not care about anything now," Amelia said in a tone of some pique—"you, who have a lover to

console you. I am sure we are not so fortunate, are we, Rachel? It is a pity, however, that he is going to Gibraltar."

"Oh yes—yes," cried Agnes, laying her head despairingly upon the bed: "how shall I exist without him?—how bear all my wretchedness now?"

"Now? why, much better than you did before, I should think," remarked Amelia.

"No, no, it will be more insupportable—maddening! Oh Gerald—dear Gerald!" And she pressed to her lips the treasured ring.

"How did all this begin?" persisted Amelia. But Rachel, who had stood somewhat thoughtful and grave, now interposed. She approached her young sister, saying with firmness, and somewhat of severity—

"Come, Agnes, get up! we must have no more of this nonsense. I think we have gone rather too far; and if you betray yourself, as you seem likely to do, by this behaviour, it will be a fine business for us all. So I advise you, Agnes, to make haste and compose yourself, and return to the schoolroom, or all will be discovered by that lynx-eyed Miss Ricketts. There—do you not hear Lady Rachel's bell? She will soon be sallying forth. Come, give me your ring—you are not going to keep it, silly girl, for Miss Ricketts's edification. 'G. C.,' indeed!" she exclaimed, looking at the signet, which she took from Agnes' passive hand—for at the sound of the bell she had again started up—the loving woman restored by that dreaded sound to the cowed, frightened school-girl—smoothed her hair, and dried her eyes, gazing at the same time anxiously and fearfully at her sisters.

"Well, I will take care of your ring; and now let me finish the affair which has turned out such a pretty piece of business. Come along!" and Agnes was conducted back to the dismal schoolroom from which she had so nefariously absconded: and only waiting to see that all was right for the present, Rachel left her to the tender mercies of Miss Ricketts.

The coming footsteps had been those of a servant sent to inform Mr. Gerald Cameron—whom he found examining with great apparent interest the china ornaments on the chimney-piece—that Mrs. Beauchamp requested he would join her in her sitting-room; and Gerald was not sorry for this opportunity of recovering in some degree his composure ere he met his sister.

With the natural incautiousness of his disposition, he had been surprised, in the space of a few minutes, into changing an unmeaning frolic into an affair which he must henceforth consider as most serious, important, and binding.

The young man followed the servant to the suite of apartments appropriated to Lena's use. She rose from the sofa upon

which she reclined, to greet him affectionately, but there was a slight constraint in her manner, which was accounted for by a half open door discovering Mr. Beauchamp writing at a table in the adjoining apartment. Any doubt, therefore, as to whether he should let Lena into the secret of the morning or not, was at an end; and this was almost a relief, for besides the confession in itself being most embarrassing to make, Gerald was considerate enough to view the subject as one not fitted for his young sister's ear: she should not be dragged into it as a party in the clandestine business. He knew, too, that anything of the sort was so foreign to her experience—to her conception—that he could scarcely expect even her sympathy; certainly not her connivance. She, who had been brought up in principles of such purity and openness, every thought, word, and deed, freely exposed to her parents.

"Dear Lena," he thought, "she would only open wide her large eyes, look shocked and frightened, and henceforth turn red and pale, and become nervous and embarrassed, whenever my name was mentioned."

Better, then, as it was; he therefore did not feel quite so much inclination as he would otherwise have done to rise and slam to the door, when, ever and anon, though Mr. Beauchamp had not come forward to greet him, he beheld the light eyes of his brother-in-law lifted up from his pursuit to stare upon them, with cool though keen observance.

Nothing like confidential or intimate conversation could proceed between the brother and sister under such evident espionage.

"You are tired, I am afraid, dear Lena, this morning," he said, as she resumed her reclining position on the sofa. "You look quite like an invalid."

"I do not feel tired," said Lena; "but Mr. Beauchamp—"

"Says you are!" Gerald rejoined, laughing.

Lena, with an alarmed look, turned her eyes towards the opposite apartment.

"He wishes me," she continued, "to keep quiet."

"Old woman!" Gerald thought within himself; but merely said—"Well! I suppose it is only at present. Where is the event to take place—here, or at the Towers?"

"I do not think it is quite decided," Lena answered meekly.

"Which would you prefer?" asked her brother.

"I do not much mind," she said, lowering her voice; and as she did so, the sound of the scratching pen in the next room ceased.

"Of course, my mother will be in attendance?" Gerald continued.

The blood rushed to Lena's cheeks, and she turned her eyes upon his face, with anxious interest, as if she had rather hoped to have learnt something on that subject from her brother.

"But I suppose all that will be settled before November!" Gerald continued, seeing how little use it was questioning poor Lena on any point concerning family arrangements; "I am sure my mother will only be too charmed to come to you; to have such an excuse for a trip over the Channel," he added, smiling. "Besides, my father will have to come to London sometime thereabouts."

"Will he indeed, dear darling father?" said Lena, her eyes filling with tears. "Oh, how delightful it would be!" she added, thoughtfully. "Then, indeed, I hope my confinement will take place in London, unless, indeed"—and she paused with a sigh—"they come to the Towers."

And again she sighed, she scarcely knew why, except it was from the strangely chastened feeling with which she contemplated this once most delightful of anticipations.

The conversation was now interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Beauchamp, who deemed the private interview, in which he had indulged his wife with her brother, sufficiently prolonged for every reasonable or desirable end.

"My dear Lena, how are you now? Not tiring yourself, I hope? Good morning, Mr. Cameron."

Gerald rose immediately: he felt no inclination to linger any longer.

"Well, I must be off, dear Lena!" he exclaimed.

Lena rose, pale and tearful.

With moistened eyes Gerald pressed his sister in his arms; shook hands—for her sake—more graciously than he felt inclined to do with Mr. Beauchamp; and sadder—if not wiser—than when he entered, quitted the Belgrave Square mansion.

Two countenances ever haunted his imagination whilst far away from England—two young faces—and with the remembrance of each, a sharp pang smote his heart.

CHAPTER XII.

"It was the Spirit's harmony,
The mind's unbroken melody,
Breathing its sweetness through the whole:
It was the glance that spoke a soul
All fearless in its purity."

Mrs. Conyngham

"How handsome and agreeable Lord Alfred is!" observed Mrs. Cameron, after one of the long firelight visits, which, as

the short days drew in, it became his Lordship's almost daily custom to pay to the General's family.

"Very!" Janet took upon herself to answer from her low seat in the corner of the fire. But though her mother smiled at the ready reply, it was evidently not Janet's concurrence in that opinion which could satisfy her; for she still glanced expectantly towards the opposite corner, where Annie sat with little Laura on her knee.

She, too, thereupon lifted up her eyes, and answered, "Yes!" but carelessly, and with somewhat of surprise; for she had long known her mother's exalted opinion of Lord Alfred, and wondered what should now make her think it necessary to start the praise of him anew.

After this little monosyllable, Annie again bent her head over her little sister's shoulder.

"Do you think Frank handsome and agreeable too, mamma?" asked Minny.

"Frank, indeed! You are on very intimate terms with Mr. Mildmay, I think, Minny."

"Oh, he told me to call him Frank. He is so kind and goodnatured. Don't you love him, Annie?"

Annie laughed and tossed back her head, showing her cheeks celestial rosy red.

"I wonder we have not seen him to-day," she then said. "Mamma, does he dine here this evening?"

Mrs. Cameron replied, looking thoughtfully at her daughter—

"Yes, he does, with Lord Alfred and one or two others."

"Lord Alfred again!" Annie remarked.

"Have you any objection, my dear? Do you wish us to confine our attentions to our little *aid-de-camp*, as I think my Annie has become rather too inclined to do?"

"I, Mamma?"

"Yes, Annie; the great art is to make oneself generally agreeable; and I have remarked that you do not assist me as much as you used to do. And though it may be very pleasant to sit comfortably in a corner, talking and laughing in a friendly way with young Mildmay, yet—"

"Oh, Mamma," Annie laughingly interrupted, "you know Papa thought I was becoming too forward, and so—"

"But, Annie," said her mother, when the young girl paused abruptly in her speech, "you over-act your part. I assure you, Lord Alfred is quite jealous sometimes. He says—'Miss Cameron is very partial and very cruel; I never even have a word or a look!'"

"Oh yes!" replied Annie, curling her pretty lip; "that is because Lord Alfred thinks that every one's looks and words

should be for him, and no one else. He is very conceited, and very impertinent too," Annie continued, with some irritation. "Do you know, he said to me last night, 'Miss Annie, take care you do not become too fond of that little fellow.' Little fellow! such a way to speak of Frank Mildmay! I am sure he is not so very little—quite tall enough—and—and—as to being too fond of him—"

"Well, Annie?" asked Mrs. Cameron, as Annie paused, for she wished to hear the sentence concluded.

"I know," she continued, "I could be much fonder of him than of his Lordship, in spite of his six feet and all the *et ceteras*."

"I will not have you disparage my favourite, Annie," her mother smilingly replied, for such frankness gave her little uneasiness on the one important point: "a handsome, delightful creature no one can pretend not to think him; and as to having a good opinion of himself, how can he help it, when every one but you, naughty little girl, conspire to give it to him? But did he really tell you not to become too fond of Frank Mildmay?" Mrs. Cameron inquired, with an amused and not ill-pleased expression on her countenance.

"He did, indeed, Mamma."

"And what did you say? I hope—that there was no fear of such a conclusion, and that you have been so intimate with him on account of his being a friend of the Duchess of Stratheden."

"Oh no, Mamma, I did not tell him all that, not considering such an explanation necessary, even if it had entered into my head. I only thought it was no business of his, and told his Lordship so as civilly as I could."

"I hope so, indeed, Annie. You must not get into the way of making rude speeches—nothing men hate so much in a girl as *brusquerie* of manner."

Annie might have felt how clear was her conscience of any such misdemeanour, and how more than usually inclined her mother seemed, to assume a tone of bitterness with regard to her conduct. However, she received the censure with cheerful submission.

"Lord Alfred," resumed Mrs. Cameron, "is very kind to interest himself so much in you, Annie. He said something of the same sort to me the other day, but not to warn me of *your* becoming too fond of Frank Mildmay, but of *his* becoming too fond of you."

"How very silly!" Annie exclaimed, in a tone of scornful warmth, at the same time colouring deeply. "What did he mean?"

"Why, silly girl! I think there is such a thing as a young man losing a heart to

a pretty little lady, when she bestows so large a portion of smiles and kind words upon him."

It was silly of Mrs. Cameron to put such ideas into her daughter's head!

"Too fond of me!"

Annie turned away her head. Little Laura was gone; but she cast her beautiful eyes on the fire, and mused with an expression as of newly-awakened imaginings.

The mother might have deemed her hint—which she only considered of consequence as far as it might interfere with Lord Alfred's interest—had taken effect; for from that evening Annie's words to the young *aid-de-camp* became few, her smiles less gay and unconstrained. And his mood, too, seemed to alter. The General would innocently rally him a dozen times a day, and tell him he was in love; so absent, so negligent, even on duties connected with his situation, had he become. Mrs. Cameron begged him to confide in her his ailments, and allow her to prescribe for him; for such unequal spirits and altered looks could only betoken bodily illness.

"Does he not look ill, Annie?" she would say, as they sat together; and Annie, for the observing glance necessary for the required assent, would raise her eyes towards Frank's face, half shadowed by their jetty fringe, and say, "she really did not see that Mr. Mildmay looked so ill."

And well might Annie have so said; for if she ventured to see at all, such remarks seldom failed to bring a bright flush to Frank Mildmay's features.

But still, through all such altered demeanour, there was on the young *aid-de-camp's* part, no diminishment of the intercourse which he enjoyed with the General's family; and though it was in that house he had found the melancholy which was gaining such ground over his spirits, he would as soon have thought of attempting its cure by flying from "the hearth and home" he so dearly loved, as the wounded man would endeavour to heal his pain by lopping off with his own hand the injured limb. He was young—he was inexperienced—if his conduct need excuse. He felt it was no wrong, no dishonour, indulging and fostering feelings, of which for long he knew himself to be the victim.

And he willingly yielded himself a sacrifice to the dangerous, fascinating flame—his spirit now bounding, now drooping beneath its power. But this state of affairs could not continue ever thus—how could it?

Can two young hearts beat in perfect sympathy, answering throb for throb, and long remain silent and unconfessed? Why

should they? Annie and Frank Mildmay could not tell, though for many a day they had suffered it so to be. They wondered much, indeed, that so it had been, when the moment came at length which broke the spell, and gave to their young hearts that joy, no tongue can express—that bliss which it is seldom the lot of human beings to taste more than once in life. We know not how it came to pass—what was the magic word, or look, or tone which did the work—perchance it was the circumstance of the young people finding themselves alone together—alone in the dim twilight, or rather firelight, hour.

Mrs. Cameron had not returned from a somewhat distant expedition she had taken that day with most of the children. We do not know what was the untoward accident which had prevented Annie from being of the party—perhaps a headache—for the eventide found her seated in pensive mood near the large hearth, her hand leaning against the side of the fireplace.

Half an hour after, found her not alone—still on her lowly seat, but with her head thrown back—her eyes raised with trusting, innocent affection—her hand locked in that of Frank Mildmay—and he seated by her side, gazing down upon her in a dream of happiness unalloyed—love and tenderness lighting up his interesting countenance almost into beauty.

Yes! Frank Mildmay had been surprised into revealing the pent-up feelings of his heart, and Annie had confessed "with virgin pride" her answering affection.

"But your parents, Annie!" the lover said at length, the first pang of doubt disturbing the blissful dream that had entranced him. How often, alas! those honoured names must prove the awakening bugbear of many a young heart's forgetful dream of love and joy!

But they did not come in any such guise to Annie's ears; as yet, she knew them but as associated with unbounded indulgence and affection; she had never had cause to experience their colder characters of prudence and duty.

She therefore only said—

"Yes, Frank—dear Papa and Mamma; we must tell them when they return, that we love one another."

"Yes, dearest Annie! but will that knowledge give them any satisfaction? On the contrary, may not it put an end to the happiness we are just beginning to enjoy—cause us, perhaps, to part?" said Frank.

"I hope not, Frank," argued Annie. "Papa is so kind, so anxious for his children's happiness. But why do you fear, Frank? Are you not rich?"

"No, not rich, Annie!" her lover answered with a sad smile; "but not so poor

as that I might not make one who loved me happy; but——"

"Then why fear at all, Frank?" Annie interrupted. "One who loved you must be happy and content to live in a cottage, on a dry crust. And my parents: what can they desire more for me than comfort and happiness?"

CHAPTER XIII.

"Had we never loved so kindly,
Had we never loved so blindly,
Never met, and never parted,
We had ne'er been broken-hearted."

Burns.

"ANNIE, ANNIE!" called Mrs. Cameron, on her return home that evening not finding their daughter in the drawing-room. Annie soon responded to the call of her parents, and found them in her mother's dressing-room.

"Not dressed, my dear child!" her mother said, after the first affectionate greeting. "It is so late: go, darling, for we have no time to lose—put on your last pretty dress—Lord Alfred and a few others dine here to-day."

"Oh, Mamma—Papa—wait one moment: I have something very particular to tell you."

The General turned as he was about to leave the room, and Mrs. Cameron desired Mansell, who had come to dress her mistress, to return again when she rang her bell, and with no small degree of curiosity prepared to receive the "very particular" information which Annie's countenance, as well as words, announced. She did not keep them long in suspense, though she felt a greater degree of nervous embarrassment trouble her than she had expected to experience. Standing between them, before the fire, her eyes bent upon the ground, she murmured—

"I scarcely know how to tell you—what has passed this evening—but Frank Mildmay has been with me this evening, and——and——"

"Good Heavens, what!" exclaimed the easily excited Mrs. Cameron in hasty alarm.

"What, my dear child?" exclaimed the General, also quickly and anxiously.

"And he told me," faltered Annie, "that—he loved me, dear Father," and her cheeks were crimsoned; but she lifted up her eyes to her parents' face with an expression of innocent calmness.

Mrs. Cameron looked at her husband in startled silence; and the General, after the pause of surprise occasioned by the unexpected declaration, turned gravely towards Annie.

"That was rather imprudent on Frank Mildmay's part," he said.

"Imprudent!—presumptuous—ridiculous—impertinent! I should say," fired up Mrs. Cameron, indignation flashing from her eyes.

"Nay, Laura, be not so vehement!" interposed the kind-hearted General. "We must hear more about this affair first. You were quite right, Annie, dear, to tell us directly; and what did *you* say to this?"

"Oh, Papa——" Annie began timidly. "I hope, indeed," Mrs. Cameron interrupted, "that you showed a proper degree of anger at his presuming to talk in such a manner to you, and that you behaved with discretion upon the occasion."

"Mamma, how could I be angry?" the young girl beseechingly exclaimed.

"Why not angry, Annie?—how can you ask such an absurd question?"

"Because——because, Mamma——I love Frank so very much myself."

"Ah! indeed, is that it, Miss Annie?" the General said, half dismayed, half amused, at this frank avowal; whilst Mrs. Cameron exclaimed—

"How absurd, Annie! You know not what you say."

"Absurd to love Frank Mildmay!" Annie rejoined, in an earnest deprecating tone. "Oh why, mother?"

Mrs. Cameron certainly had no better answer at the moment than that it was *wholly* inexpedient to cherish such an affection. She was so chafed and angry at this unexpected communication, that her expressive countenance plainly evinced the state of her mind.

And poor Annie, whose heart shrunk with pain from this almost first look of real displeasure she had ever received from her too-indulgent parent, turned for comfort to her father, laying her head caressingly on his arm, as he stood looking "more in sorrow than in anger" upon his darling child.

"And pray, where is Mr. Mildmay all this time?" inquired Mrs. Cameron.

"He is dining at the barracks, Mamma," said Annie, "but——" and she hesitated, and added, in a changed timid voice, "I promised to send for him if——"

"Oh!" said the General, "we will not talk further upon this subject to-night—it will do us all good to sleep upon it—Mr. Frank and all—it will do him no harm."

Annie begged her mother would excuse her from appearing below that evening. She shrunk particularly from the idea of meeting Lord Alfred, and encountering from his Lordship any of the light wit and playful raillery with which he had of late made it his custom to assail her, and which now touched too sensibly the chords of her feelings to be tolerated.

Mrs. Cameron did not combat her desire, but suffered it so to be; and finishing her

own toilette, told her, as she left the room, that she should come and talk to her immediately after dinner.

"Do, dear Mamma," said Annie gratefully, for she longed to pour forth more openly all the thoughts and feelings of her full heart into the ear of one she had ever found so tender and willing a sympathizer in time of need. Her mother's clouded countenance was but the effect of surprise—perhaps she was tired—she could not be really angry with her Annie!

Poor girl! she sat all the time of her mother's absence thinking of Frank—hoping all things—building bright castles in the air; her young spirit braced by hope and bright imaginings, she hailed with trustful and glad affection Mrs. Cameron's re-appearance. Alas! she came but to scatter her fair fancies in the dust!

After a long hour's converse, the poor little girl went weeping bitterly to bed, having been assured by her mother, that for all reasons—wisest, discreetest, best—any idea of a marriage with Frank Mildmay must be a thing unthought of.

Every argument, however, fell unconvincingly on Annie's mind until one conclusive reason was brought forward by Mrs. Cameron—that such an event would break her heart! To have, she said, whilst tears fell from her eyes, every hope and cherished expectation so cruelly destroyed, to see her child—so young—throwing herself away by making so miserable an engagement!—and what could it entail upon her but poverty and its consequent evils?

The affecting sight of her mother's tears, and the picture of the broken heart, how could Annie resist? But the flame of love called forth that evening was not so easily to be extinguished!—Oh no! the morrow brought forth its fresh revival, when in her parents' presence once more the young lovers met, and their case was discussed and canvassed—not coldly, and without sympathy, but with the anxiety and earnestness of parents, pitiful and tender to the young pure natural feelings of a beloved child.

Yet equally painful and unsatisfactory was the discussion to the two loving hearts—for firm was the decree "that they were too young to wed—too poor to be united." And not only this, but that no engagement could be permitted—the affair must be *wholly* at an end—indeed they must part at once. But the distress and anguish this sentence occasioned was very trying to the indulgent feelings of both their judges. Many affecting scenes were suffered to be enacted before the pair could bring themselves to look with anything like fortitude on the hard decree.

Frank made attempts to absent himself from the General's house, except on those hours when duty called him to it. Annie tried to endure his absence. But then they met abroad, and a word, or a look, would destroy it all. And then the General's kind heart would melt at the woe-begone, beseeching countenance of his young *aid-de-camp*, and on parting with him after duty he could not sometimes resist saying, "Well, Mildmay, you had better come and dine with us to-day!" And Mildmay would come, and once more would the lovers sit together, talk together, and dance together—but *not as lovers*, it was to be understood by all!

But how could any one who looked upon them, think that such an understanding had been established between them as long as the young *aid-de-camp* and the General's daughter breathed the same air together? All who beheld the two young creatures could not fail to be interested in so charming and well-suited a pair. Every heart was enlisted in a case—in these days so rare—of true *bona fide* love! Yes!—for in these worldly days, old and young seem to have imbibed the spirit of the age. The education, the ways of the present period, seem to crush all natural affections—to render cold and calculating even the spontaneous feelings of the heart.

There never could have existed a passion more pure, more primitive, than this innocent girl's. Unchecked, untutored as she had ever been from her birth, she was a complete child of nature; and she now loved as such. Her attachment had in it something of idolatry. Of the worldly distinctions of rank and fortune she thought nothing. It was the difference in his demeanour—in his kind, winning manner—from the others with whom she associated, that elevated Frank in her opinion. She would listen to him with charmed ear and downcast look of mute delight, and her cheeks would mantle with enthusiasm. Poor Annie! hers was love indeed—not such measured feelings as are now to be found—in the nineteenth century.

Annie Cameron had won all hearts by her beauty and amiability; and Frank Mildmay was popular and beloved by all his brother officers. Even Lord Alfred professed a great interest and sympathy in the affair, so that Annie was somewhat melted by his kindness, and would suffer him to talk to her on the subject. But when, one day, during Frank's banishment, he had offered to be of any service to her in the way of communication with her favoured lover, Annie's honest open spirits received the idea with surprise, spurning it with disdain. His Lordship was not offended, but looked with no small increase of admiration on the beau-

tiful high-minded girl, and only heartily wished she had taken a fancy to himself, instead of the little Mildmay.

Annie's gratitude towards her parents was deep-felt. She remembered what girls in her situation often forget—how they had loved her, how they had trusted her; and she would have sacrificed even her love to her filial devotion. Without their consent she must not act—all must be clear and open to them. They must be right—dreadful as she felt their decree. It was, as we have said, beautiful, this love of Annie Cameron's!

But the affair became too conspicuous, too much talked of, to be suffered any longer. Some decided step must be taken—part they must. Time had only brought more hostile force against the lovers—for Frank Mildmay's relations having heard what was passing, wisely and prudently refused to countenance him in any such rash proceeding, as marrying so young a girl without a farthing. So the poor lover, beset on every side, could only put his trust in Annie's strength of love and constancy, to conquer her parents' prejudices. And she, his only hope—even she failed him!

Yes—one day the General sent for him, to hear, as he supposed, his final decree. But when he arrived at the door of the apartment into which he was about to enter, it slowly opened, and Annie appeared before him, her eyes red with weeping.

"My own sweet Annie!" he exclaimed.

"Dear Frank!" her pale lips responded, as she suffered him to seize her hand, and press it fervently to his heart.

"Frank!" she murmured, "I am come—"

"Do not say that you have come to tell me that all hope is over—that I must leave you—that we must really part. Oh, do not be so cruel, Annie!"

"Cruel!" poor Annie echoed, with a reproachful smile. "Oh, Frank!"

"Forgive me, Annie, but indeed it would kill me to hear such a doom from your lips."

"Then I ought not to have come here; for—Frank—dear Frank"—and Annie's tears again gushed forth—"I have come to tell you so. Yes, it must be so: I have promised my father and mother to give up all thoughts of what would indeed have made me but too happy. But then, alas! I could not, would not make them unhappy, or act in defiance of their commands. Oh, Frank, look not so reproachfully upon me, or you will break my heart;" and poor Annie wept bitterly.

"And I," exclaimed Frank, despairingly; "what am I to do?"

The tears forced themselves down the

young man's cheeks, and he was pale as death.

"Annie!" he murmured, "such love as ours ought to overrule every other consideration. Will you, can you give me up for ever?"

"For ever, Frank?—that is a long, long, dreary word," said Annie, lifting up her head, and trying to smile through her tears.

"Will you promise, then?" cried Frank, seizing her hand, a gleam of renewed hope brightening his countenance.

"Nay, Frank, I must promise nothing, for that would be breaking my word, which I have pledged to my parents. For the present, all, all must be over between us. Be courageous in spirit, as a soldier should be. For shame, Frank, that I, a weak girl, should have to preach courage to you," she continued. "Look to brighter days—they may yet come."

We will not dilate further upon this melancholy love-scene. The fortnight passed away, and once—only once more—Frank and Annie met. The General during that interval often saw the poor young man, and ever evinced towards him the affection of a father.

Mrs. Cameron had also several interviews with him, and sought to comfort and cheer him. But poor Annie beheld the eve of the departure of the regiment arrive, without the melancholy consolation of seeing her poor Frank once more to bid him adieu. Under the present circumstances it was considered expedient, that young Mildmay should relinquish his staff situation and return to his regimental duties.

The officers of the — Hussars came to eat their farewell dinner at the General's. It was rather a melancholy party: many regretted this premature summons—the — Hussars being ordered to take the place of some other regiment suddenly ordered to India. All were sorry to take leave of the family by whose hospitality their *sejour* at Athlone had been rendered so agreeable. All felt, too, for the pretty Annie, who, though she strove hard to exert herself, looked so pale and dispirited—so different from the bright, joyous little creature that had greeted their arrival.

A few other ladies having been invited to join the party, to disperse the gloom, in which she herself most largely participated, Mrs. Cameron sat down to the piano, and struck a few chords of a waltz. One or two of the young men availed themselves of the idea, and persuaded the little girls and the other young ladies to take a few turns, but all were too considerate to ask Annie to dance.

Lord Alfred sat down by her side, and

Mrs. Cameron, from the piano, looked upon them, and sighed bitterly within herself. She looked shortly after in the same direction: Lord Alfred was gone, and in his place sat a pale, spectre-like image of him whom her thoughts reviled.

Yes, it was indeed poor Frank Mildmay. A sudden irresistible impulse had led him to come and see his poor Annie once more; and absorbed in their own miserable feelings, the young pair sat pale and woful, gazing upon one another; Annie silent, and speaking only by her large melancholy eyes, and Frank murmuring in her ear broken expressions of sorrow and despair.

"Annie, shall we have one waltz together—one more—the last perhaps we may ever dance with one another?"

The plaintive tone and look could not be resisted. Annie rose mechanically, and all were startled and moved by the unexpected sight of the sad couple, flying round so despairingly as it were, and with such pale anguish upon their countenances.

"Oh, Annie, Annie, why did you choose me as your partner that first night of my arrival?—why did you make me love you?"

Some such strains might have been heard breathed—or—

"Frank—Frank—I cannot bear this any longer. Stop—stop—my heart will burst!—Let me go."

One parting embrace, and then Annie was gone, and Frank Mildmay left standing alone, his head leaning against the door, motionless, entranced with misery.

On the morrow the — Hussars set forth upon their march. Their road led them past the mansion of the general, who, standing at the gates with his family, received from each man his parting military salute.

It was a striking scene to watch the bright array pass by, on that fine February morning, followed by the cheering crowd which generally attend on such occasions; the gay parting tune played by the band, sounding so clearly in the frosty air.

But Annie, as she strained her eyes down from the solitary chamber into which she had flown, gazed upon the glittering show, and saw it but as a dark funereal procession, bearing her lover from her sight for ever.

Yes, from the window she beheld the march of the departing troops. "Frank! Frank!" she murmured despairingly, as she strained her aching gaze after him, as the morning sun glittered about his figure, and his plume waved in the breeze.

Lord Alfred looked up, smiled, and waved his hand to the party below. But young Mildmay rode past, his eyes bent upon the ground, only raising his hand mechanically to his head for the general salute.

The music broke forth in wilder, louder strains—a solemn dead-march they sounded to Annie Cameron's ears. Once more she looked—her eyes caught Frank Mildmay's retreating figure; it passed away like a bright vision from her sight, and left her all in darkness.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Years to a mother bring distress,
But do not make her love the less."

Wordsworth.

Mrs. CAMERON was now a grandmother. More than two months ago, her Lena had given birth to a daughter. This event, it had ever been understood, was to have taken place under her mother's superintendence, and up to the very time, Mrs. Cameron had been in daily expectation of the summons to England. The General had even made arrangements dependent on that proposed expedition. No notice, however, was latterly taken of the inquiries upon the subject, made from time to time by Mrs. Cameron in her letters in allusion to her daughter's expected confinement; till finally came the formal announcement from Mr. Beauchamp of the event, with the simple addition that he hoped, ere long, Lena and himself should have the pleasure of introducing their infant daughter to her maternal grand-parents. At last a despatch arrived from Mr. Beauchamp, graciously intimating, that if it were the intention of General and Mrs. Cameron to visit England shortly, it would give Lady Rachel and himself much pleasure to see them at the Towers, and their daughter's feelings on the subject he need not express. Lena had been somewhat delicate since her confinement, he added, and naturally desired to behold her parents, and he, Mr. Beauchamp, was anxious that they should satisfy themselves concerning their daughter's welfare, after so critical an era, as to the state of her health and constitution.

Taking advantage of this invitation, Mrs. Cameron and Annie purposed leaving Ireland, accompanied by the General, as soon as it possibly could be arranged.

Lena had shed many tears when she learned that her mother was not to be invited to attend her confinement; but she had become resigned to it. She could not, however, so resignedly support the restraint and mistaken care, which kept her infant from her, but at the stated times, when the babe was brought in form by the attendants—mere slaves of Lady Rachel's will and regulations—and committed for a short space to her trembling, longing arms.

But even this was slight suffering to

that which she endured, when she found her earnest pleading to be suffered to nurse her child, unheeded, and beheld the woman chosen for that office. It had been one of her sweetest anticipations in contemplating her maternal prospects, to image her baby as she had often watched her mother's infants—their rosy cheeks against her gentle bosom, and their innocent eyes lifted as it were with silent joy and grateful confiding affection to the loving face bent over it with such tenderness. And of this delight—this most natural bliss—she was to be deprived. For even if Lady Rachel would have consented to agree as to her strength and capability to fulfil that office, Mr. Beauchamp decidedly objected to her assuming it, and indeed had only abstained from placing a decided negative to any hopes she might have entertained, till the fear of any prejudicial effects from the agitation had passed.

"Not only," he said, "would the practice spoil her figure, but it would absorb too much of her time and attention, interfering with that which was due to himself."

Poor Lena! it was about the hardest trial with which she had yet to compete, when first her babe was hurried from her side, to hear its little cries soothed and silenced by the hireling appointed to usurp her place in that, her natural province; the more so, as she could not but be aware that hers was no case in which either her own or her child's well-doing was really concerned—as the doctor, a few days after the child's birth, when the subject was broached in her presence, had answered her baseaching wistful look by saying, "that he saw no reason—if it were at all desirable—against Mrs. Beauchamp's continuing to nurse her baby for a few months;" though he had let the matter rest, when the frowning brow of Lady Rachel, who had just been laying down the law for the contrary decision, and the cold reply of Mr. Beauchamp, "that it was not in any way desirable," showed to the obsequious physician, these votes to be decidedly *not* in favour of the proposition.

Six weeks after Lena's confinement, the party returned to the Towers from London, and the renovated nurseries were thrown open to receive in due form the new Miss Beauchamp. Lena smiled with tearful pleasure when her sisters-in-law, as the party alighted, pressed eagerly round the little stranger; even the timid Agnes breaking through all restraint of Miss Ricketts—all fear of Lady Rachel's frowns—to honour and welcome the arrival of the little niece; forgetful of the obeisance due to the formidable mother, till called to recollection by the stern voice, demanding of the nurse if she deemed it a proper

measure to keep the infant exposed to the cold draught of the hall?

Lena, reclining once more in her stately chamber, wondered—whilst a dark sensation of depression stole over her soul—whether she should ever be allowed to exercise the rights of a mother over her own child. Time brought no satisfactory answer to this doubt. The hedge of constraints by which all her actions were constrained, extended even to her nursery intercourse. She seemed to feel almost an intruder when she ventured to enter the apartments except at the time of her daily stated visit.

The nurses, soon perceiving the little influence or authority allowed to the young mother, yielded no more respect or consideration to her interference or suggestions, than they would have done to one of the aunts of their nursing. And when Lena did sometimes escape at irregular times to spend a few moments in the nursery, accompanied often by one of her sisters, especially Agnes—who seemed ever on the watch to creep in and catch for a passing moment a sight of the babe—a message would usually be brought from Mr. Beauchamp to recall her to his presence.

He could not well understand why the stated visits made and received by her infant should not suffice his young wife; and it was not surprising that so he should think, when he remembered that his own mother used to be satisfied by coldly touching the hand of her babies, instead of devouring them with warm kisses, and pressing—as did his fond young Lena—her babe with rapturous love to her bosom. And the jealous suspicion that either the pleasure of escaping from his society, or that of enjoying a gossip with his sisters, might have something to do with it, rendered him still more tenacious and interfering on the subject.

All these vexatious annoyances at length began to do their work of mischief—Lena pined under this unnatural mode of existence—her spirits and even her health became visibly affected. Her strength, scarcely renewed, threatened a relapse; so much so, that Mr. Beauchamp began to take alarm, and though of course shutting his eyes to the real cause, was seized with the fancy of inviting her parents to visit her—probably because he thought Mrs. Cameron, who must understand her daughter's constitution better than any one else, might set Lena to rights by her advice and experience; and partly was he influenced by his desire to have the visit over, which was, sometime or another, inevitable, and which had long been weighing heavily on his mind. Therefore had the invitation been despatched, and its immediate acceptance arrived.

CHAPTER XV.

"She smiles not in her now domain;
But with an aching brow
Recalls those pleasant hours again—
She is not happy now."

CARPENTER.

THE Camerons had been received with all due respect by their son-in-law; he conducted their impatient steps to Lena, who, half fainting with eager nervous longing to rush forth to meet them, had been desired to await their arrival in her sitting-room.

Barring this stretch of formality, nothing interfered with the perfect contentment of the General and his lady during the first moments of their arrival. Their feelings of joy on re-embracing their daughter were all-absorbing. To see her pale and delicate they had been prepared—that she was overcome more than elated by the joy of the meeting, was but according to her gentle nature; and when she was suffered, according to their eager desire, to lead them to her splendid nurseries, to show them her fair sleeping babe, as it lay cradled on down and pillowed on satin; and then, by her husband's desire, she preceded the trio through her princess-like apartments, they might truly—if their experience could have rested there—have been satisfied that the lot of their daughter had indeed fallen on fair ground—that hers was a goodly heritage.

"Yes, dear Annie, this is something like what I must have for you!" was Mrs. Cameron's comment, as the dressing-room door shut upon them almost immediately afterwards, when they entered to make a hasty toilette.

Annie only smiled faintly and vaguely; her heart was in no condition to appreciate the good wishes of her mother, even had she felt so satisfied that her sister's lot was of so purely enviable a nature.

Lady Rachel did not make herself visible till the dinner hour, when she joined the guests in the drawing-room, the two Miss Beauchamps then also making their appearance. The meal was certainly not one of the most lively; and the almost overstrained civility of their host would have tended more to curb, than to set at ease, any spirits less nobly independent than those of the General and his lady.

Lena spoke little. The expression as of some present disquiet often chased the earnest smile of love, which, as her gaze fastened on her father, or roamed onward to her mother, or turned to the sister by her side, would seem for a moment to wrap her in a dream of joyful bewilderment.

But her parents saw only that she was the absorbing object of her husband's attention and anxiety. Mr. Beauchamp's

eye was constantly turned upon his wife; the little she ate or drank was the chief subject which seemed to interest or concern him; whilst the eyes of Lady Rachel—which fell frowning and with a withering glance on her own daughters when they chanced or deigned to travel their way—bent even with gracious condescension upon her fair supporter.

They had not much unrestrained enjoyment of each other's society during the evening; but on retiring for the night, Mrs. Cameron put her arm within Lena's, and said, turning with one of her resistless smiles to her son-in-law—

"I must run away with Lena for a little chat ere we go to bed;" and Mr. Beauchamp, taking out his watch, said, looking at his wife—

"It is half-past ten, Lena. A quarter of an hour, at the utmost: no more, I beg."

Ere the first excitement of finding themselves for the first time left to the uninterrupted, unrestrained enjoyment of the reunion had subsided, and their intercourse began to assume a more collected and enjoyable form—the many points of mutual interest started,—home information required and given! there was a knock at the door—Lena's maid, sent from Mr. Beauchamp, to say that the quarter of an hour was exceeded, and he hoped Mrs. Beauchamp would not sit up any longer.

"A very obedient wife, indeed!" said the General, as Lena started up as eagerly as Cinderella at the stroke of the midnight chime.

"I call this very hard," said Mrs. Cameron, as she received the parting embrace of her daughter; "but perhaps Mr. Beauchamp is quite right. You are not strong enough for the late hours for which I feel inclined to-night; and that naughty Annie looks tired to death, but will not go to bed till you do. As Mr. Beauchamp is so kind as to let us come to see you, we must not make you ill."

Poor Lena! she went to bed and awoke the next morning with a weight upon her mind which poisoned the enjoyment of an event she had anticipated as one of unmixed bliss. What was its cause? No more nor less than that a task had been imposed on the daughter, revolting every feeling of her sensitive and affectionate heart, and which on the morrow must be accomplished.

It was not to be her fate to see her parents depart, loaded with earnest entreaties to press them to remain—no, on the contrary, she was to take the earliest opportunity of placing limits to their sojourn under her roof.

Such a case may appear unnatural and over-strained—it is, however, but too true—one instance amongst others of covert

tyranny and oppression, or whatever name may be given to springs of action, which few can understand, not unparalleled in real life. For the relief of those tender hearts which may bleed in sympathy for the poor young wife's perplexity on the occasion, we will without delay bring her through the performance of her reluctant task.

She was with her mother and sister alone, the following morning, in her private sitting-room, where, in the absence of her husband, she was allowed to introduce them, though the grand saloon was the commonly understood place of entertainment for company. Just as the utter impossibility, yet the necessity of fulfilling the dreaded command began to press so heavily upon her, that Mrs. Cameron could not fail to be more strongly impressed with the something which had before struck her as constrained and ill at ease in her daughter's demeanour, the mother said—

"Lena, I must write a few lines to the Duchess; she wishes to know when we are to be in London. She has some kind plan to propose concerning Annie, though not to give her a London season, I fear, for she is to be abroad all the summer; but perhaps it will be as well, and next spring she has promised to introduce her."

"Would you like to go abroad, dear Annie?" Lena asked.

Poor Annie was not just then in a state of feeling in which the power of liking anything very much is possible; though at the same time it renders one very submissive to the likings of others on our account. And so she smiled a pensive assent.

"And when shall I say, dear Lena, that we shall be in London?" Mrs. Cameron continued. "Your father is obliged to leave you on Saturday, but Annie and I can stay as many days as is agreeable to you."

Lena was sitting opposite to her mother, and she turned so deadly pale, as she listened to this address, and sat so strangely and distressingly silent when it was completed, that Mrs. Cameron was quite alarmed, and did not know what to think—it not suggesting itself to her imagination at first, that her words had so affected her daughter. But she saw her at length melt into tears, as she sobbed forth: "Mamma, Mr. Beauchamp wishes me to tell you—but it makes me so unhappy—that he—Lady Rachel—is very sorry—but—but—"

"An earlier day will be more convenient for our departure, perhaps?" Mrs. Cameron rejoined; her quick perception saved poor Lena from being the first to speak the cruel words.

The daughter's silence gave assent to her mother's conjecture, and whatever offence and surprise Mrs. Cameron might

have experienced, she answered, calmly and soothingly—

"Perhaps, dearest, it will be more expedient that we should accompany your father on Friday; it is much the best plan—much more agreeable to be informed—in short, not to be treated with ceremony—as strangers—so pray do not distress yourself, darling love. Perhaps Friday will be the best day, and it will be quite convenient for us."

"No, Saturday—that was the day Mr. Beauchamp said!" poor Lena exclaimed, beseechingly, her face now becoming scarlet with distress and shame, which her mother's considerate dissimulation of any demonstration of offence or surprise did little to allay. And Mrs. Cameron answered—

"Mr. Beauchamp is very kind—Saturday then it shall be; I dare say it will suit the General;" and an irrepressible tinge of irony and bitterness was in the tone. Four whole days for parents who had crossed the seas for the ostensible purpose of seeing their child (for they had only arrived on the Monday), was indeed a generous and hospitable extent to be invited to prolong their visit.

Whatever feelings were excited in the parents by this startling conversation—however fearfully alive it might render them to mark any symptom in their child's circumstances which pierced their hearts with misgivings and anxiety—the more disquieting, perhaps, from their being nothing tangible which met the eye that they could grasp, of which to complain—they determined not only to spare the feelings of their daughter by any show of hurt or offence on their part, but also for her sake, to meet the discourteous conduct of her husband or mother-in-law—in whichever it might have originated—in a way which might be likely to operate in their favour with respect to future occasions. So the visit continued with every outward show of smoothness, and as much cheerfulness as could possibly be expected.

Mr. Beauchamp, in consideration perhaps of the shortness of its duration, left his wife more at liberty than he had done ever since her marriage, and Lady Rachel's almost entire withdrawal from their company—seldom joining the party till dinner—was too agreeable, not to be willingly accounted in the light of good taste and consideration—rather than rudeness.

The Miss Beauchamps, though evidently restricted from free intercourse with the party, gladly stole every opportunity of passing a few minutes in the society of their pleasant guests; entering with great zest into the cheerful converse of Mrs. Cameron, whom they looked upon as a miracle of beauty and kindness. And much they enjoyed a good-natured jest

with the general, who might have been an angel in man's disguise, such was the admiring reverence with which they looked upon his fine benevolent countenance.

With what a peculiar expression of interest did that young drooping girl, Agnes, in particular, dart her furtive glances, restless, timid, as a hunted roe's, upon Gerald's father and mother, whenever they chanced to cross her path, or she ventured to steal into their presence for a few moments!

CHAPTER XVI.

"Take the pen and tell my love,
How to earth, and heaven above
* * * * *
I have watch'd, and wept, and pray'd—
* * * * *
Him on surge, or him on steed,
Still to spare, and still to speed!"

CHOLY.

THAT day Lena was to be allowed the privilege of driving her mother in her pony phaeton, closely escorted by the General and Mr. Beauchamp on horseback. Lady Rachel was also to take her accustomed drive with her two daughters.

Annie being thus left out of the arrangement, her Ladyship condescended to say at luncheon that Miss Cameron might form the third victim in her equipage. But Mrs. Cameron came to the rescue of Annie's dismayed countenance. She thanked her Ladyship for her gracious offer, but mentioned her wish that her daughter should remain at home to finish a letter to her brother at Gibraltar.

"And perhaps," she continued, "your Ladyship would be so kind as to indulge her with half an hour of Miss Agnes Beauchamp's company during our absence?"

Lady Rachel's countenance immediately darkened into its severest austerity, and she answered—

"Under the eye of Miss Ricketts, I shall have no objection."

The proposition was not taken up, for Mrs. Cameron felt quite out of patience, aware that under such auspices it would not benefit poor Agnes, for whose sake she had asked the favour.

And Annie was left alone in her mother's dressing-room to write her letter, intending at its conclusion to go to the nursery to see if she could manage to gain possession of the baby for a short time. But Annie was frustrated in her purposed visit, for ere she had quite completed the letter, in which, with her natural, fresh impulse of character, she had not scrupled to speak her mind freely to her like-minded brother on all she saw around her—a hasty knock, and still hastier opening of the door, startled her. Agnes stole in, and

closed the door after her—listened—and then drew the bolt.

Annie, having watched these manœuvres anxiously, greeted her with a smile of welcome, saying,

"Well, dear Agnes, you have come, after all, without Miss Ricketts."

"Yes!" Agnes answered, panting; "and I do not think they will hunt me on this ground; but if they do come, say I am not here, and they will be obliged to take you at your word. Oh! I am not afraid," she added, seeing Annie did not very readily assent to this last requirement, and deeming the hesitation was in consideration of herself. "I have accustomed them to such games of hide-and-seek lately, and have nerved myself to the consequences."

"Well, sit down, and I will first finish my letter for the post, and then we can have a little chat," said Annie.

Agnes obeyed. She watched the nimble little fingers of her companion for some time in silence, and then said suddenly, as she saw by the signature that the letter was finished—

"Who have you been writing to?"

"Gerald," quickly and carelessly answered Annie.

"Gerald, dear Gerald, who is in Gibraltar!" Annie continued in the same manner, after a slight pause, during which she had added some little postscript which had occurred to her—"shall I give him any message from you?"

Agnes at these words rose abruptly, and stood, to Annie's surprise, crimson and trembling as with conflicting eagerness and irresolution; speechless—yet as if a thousand tongues struggled within her breast to say unutterable things.

Annie laughed. She knew no deeper cause than the shrubby walk, which now began to recur, to excite her sympathy or consideration, and she said, archly—

"Well, shall I say, 'Agnes hopes, some day, to have another schoolroom talk, and shrubby walk with you?'"

"No," said Agnes, the light estimate which Annie's words and manner implied of the mighty secret of her own breast, piquing her girlish vanity: "no, do not say that; let me;" and with proud, but hurried, nervous eagerness, she seized the pen, and after a moment's thought traced at the bottom of Annie's page, with trembling hands, the hasty scrawl—

"Gerald! do you remember Agnes? She has not forgotten you." Then throwing down the pen, she stood with breathless emotion, so that Annie would have imagined she had written something most strange and startling, rather than those few seemingly simple words!

Agnes continued contemplating her performance, till Annie, still smiling with pro-

voking unconsciousness, drew the letter away to fold and seal it, and Agnes again seated herself; but after a moment's pause, with a countenance of important meditation, she at length broke silence:

"Annie Cameron, you are about my age, I think?"

"Yes, seventeen," Annie replied.

"And you have been already in society, and I am in worse than Egyptian bondage; but—but—" She again paused, checking the words which seemed about to declare with elated triumph some mighty relief to be in prospect.

"You must be very happy?" she continued, dropping her eyes, and voice to its usual piteous dejection.

Annie sighed.

"Frank! poor dear Frank!" she thought.

"No! not very happy!" that sigh expressed. "You are not so merry, certainly," Agnes proceeded, "as you were at Beechy. Oh that happy, delicious time! Then my sisters tell me you have had a love affair," Agnes added, stealing a glance at her companion from her downcast eyes. Poor Annie writhed beneath this abrupt careless statement, and did not answer as she bent over the seal of her letter. Again Agnes resumed—her own so differently circumstanced "love affair" alone filling her mind—

"And why did you not marry if you were in love? I thought *you* could do anything you liked."

"Not that," Annie murmured, turning away her head, as if she would avoid the subject.

"No! why not?" said Agnes.

"Because my parents disliked the idea of it," Annie quickly and somewhat impatiently replied, rising.

"Then why?" persisted her persevering tormentor, looking away, and speaking with affected carelessness—"why did you not run away with your lover?"

Annie turned her beautiful eyes with an astonished gaze full upon her companion.

"Run away!" she exclaimed; "what an idea! Do you really mean it?"

"Yes: did you never hear of people running away?" Agnes answered, looking somewhat abashed.

"Yes, I have *heard* of such a thing, certainly, but never dreamed of following such an example," Annie continued, with careless scorn.

"But if your lover implored you—if there were no other possible way of marrying?"

"No, I would not!" was the decided reply.

"Why not?" asked Agnes. "Do you think it wrong?"

"Yes, most certainly. I should be ashamed to look my father and my mother in the face again, after having acted so ungrateful, so undutiful a part. Little

love, little gratitude would it be showing them for all their affection and indulgence, if on the first sacrifice I was called upon to make for their sake, I failed in being able to support it. Any happiness I might gain by the act of disobedience, would fail, I think, to reconcile me to myself. No! I should indeed be ashamed, and hate myself ever after, to deceive and distress my darling parents, from whom I never had a secret. How, Agnes, could such a thought ever enter your imagination?"

Agnes looked at Annie's tearful countenance in silence, but her words found little sympathy in her heart. They could touch no similar chord of feeling in her breast. What had she to do with parental love and gratitude—she who *hated* her mother?

So she continued, after a pause, with some hesitation—

"Do you never have a secret from your mother—do you tell her everything?"

"Yes! everything that in the least concerns her or me."

"But if other people confide a secret to you—if I, for example, were to ask you to keep a secret for me from everybody in the world?"

"I should beg you to keep it to yourself," Annie laughingly answered; "for it would be a most intolerable burden, and would be sure to pop out some day unawares."

"I am very sorry," Agnes replied gravely, "for I have a very great secret, which no one knows but my—oh, I forget; I had better not say—but some day you may hear all, and be very much surprised, as well as many others."

CHAPTER XVII.

"Brothers in blood and nurture too,
Aliens in heart too oft do prove;
One lose, the other keep Heaven's clue—
One dwell in wrath, and one in love."

KERLE

LENA stood with her husband beneath the portico, to watch her parents' departure. The nurse and baby were there also. Mr. Beauchamp took the child and placed it in the young mother's arms—to divert, no doubt, the burst of grief he saw struggling in her heaving breast, and pale, piteous face—and the little *ruse* was not unsuccessful.

It had the effect of bringing a faint glow and tearful smile to the young mother's face, as she lifted her little darling to the last lingering gaze of her parents and sister. It gave a happier impress also to those, who with such painful feelings at their hearts, left the loved one behind.

The action appeared amiable and graceful on the husband's part, and the remembrance of that glowing smile caused their tears to flow with less bitterness, and to render less gloomy their journeying thoughts.

Arrangements were shortly afterwards entered upon for the christening of the infant daughter—an event to which a few of its highborn paternal relatives were invited. The babe received the name of "Rachel Laura," the last appellation grudgingly acceded to, as a faint compensation to the poor young mother for the banishment of all she loved from a ceremony so interesting and sacred to her feelings.

The clerical Mr. Beauchamp performed the baptismal service, and the event was not rendered the more joyous, from the fact, that the son entered and left the house without having been spoken to by his mother. Never since Lady Rachel had parted in wrath from him after the wedding, had she seen or held any communication with Ralph Beauchamp; and when it had been his brother's determination that he should be invited to officiate at the christening, she had strongly opposed the measure.

But having his own particular reasons and desires on the subject, Mr. Beauchamp persisted in following his own devices, caring little whether or not his lady mother carried out her threat of not speaking to her offending son during his visit. He was too well accustomed to that sort of domestic amiability—indeed too much inclined to it himself—to be greatly affected by a proceeding of the like nature.

So the Reverend Ralph had been invited, and had accepted the invitation, principally for two very laudable reasons of his own. The one, to make peace with his mother, as far as that were possible; another, to see his sisters, for whom he felt no little interest and compassion. As for his brother—although he was glad to christen his child and make further acquaintance with the lovely interesting creature, to whom he had united himself—there was little in common between the excellent clergyman and Lionel Beauchamp; and though they had hitherto kept on good terms, seldom for his own pleasure did the clergyman, Ralph, visit at the Towers; beside the little love and favour he had ever received from his mother, it was most painful to his feelings to remember, that one brother was an outcast from the home of his family, and also to witness the tyranny which rendered his young sister's life, a state of slavery and oppression.

Lady Rachel had, ever from his boyhood, felt the check his superiority and amiable disposition placed upon her harsh-

ness—nay, cruelty—and did not love him the better for it. Ralph Beauchamp found a new source of sympathy on now visiting the Towers.

He had often wondered how his brother conducted himself as a husband—how they "got on together," as they call it, in the household of the Towers.

He came and saw—and pity and anxiety were strongly awakened in his kind and sensible heart, by the case that insight presented to his view.

"Our sister-in-law is a sweet, beautiful creature," he said to Rachel and Amelia; "but is she happy?"

"Can that be possible, poor soul, with such a husband?" was the sisterly reply. And then followed a detail which showed how even his union with the amiable, gentle Lena—a position which ought rather to have softened and reformed his nature—had rather fanned into action the selfish, jealous inclinations of which his brother's character had ever shown symptoms.

"And you, my dear girls, cannot bear patiently the trials of Lionel's temper—trials from which a year or two may—*must*, indeed—deliver you, if you really determine, as you say, to seek the protection which circumstances justify your doing—yet that poor, sweet, patient creature has a long life before her of trial and suffering, such as, by your description, Lionel causes her to endure!"

"A long life!" Rachel answered, with a melancholy countenance; "not a very long life, I should fear—or rather should hope, poor delicate thing! He will kill her, Ralph, if he go on as he has begun. She is too angelic for a world such as ours at home."

"But the patient abiding of the meek shall not perish for ever," answered the brother. "Ah, Rachel, it is such gentle souls who shall live to all eternity!"

"It was really quite a relief," rejoined the unspiritual Amelia, "to see her once, more nearly approaching to a passion than I believe she ever before felt inclined to exhibit. It was the night of her parents' cavalier dismissal from their four days' visit. We were present, Lady Rachel and all. Lionel teased and tormented her to death about looking melancholy, till she said, with some spirit, that she could not help it, for she felt wretched. 'And why?' was asked by the considerate husband. Lena burst into tears, and said, 'Because her father and mother had left her, and it seemed that their stay had been so very short.' Lionel was struck dumb at first, I believe, by the presumption of such a declaration; but Lady Rachel looked at him, as much as to say,

"You see what you have brought upon yourself; pray, set her down properly, or allow me to do so for you;" and I dare

say would have been charmed to see him box her ears. But Lionel's hits are of a different kind. He only said, very gently, to all appearance—"I am sorry, Lena, to see this exhibition of temper. The visits of your relations must be still shorter, if such be the consequence of them."

"Ah no, Lionel!" she said, weeping bitterly; "not unless you wish to see me die; for I cannot, *cannot* live quite without them!"

"He then told her he was sorry to witness petulance, of which he had not believed her capable; and then she was as frightened and penitent as if she had really behaved ill."

It was through similar conversations that Ralph Beauchamp received these statements; and the displeasure of Lady Rachel was increased towards him by his evident leaning towards his persecuted sisters. In this feeling the elder brother was not wholly without participation.

Their mutual displeasure would have been still more highly excited, had they known that the chief subject of consultation between them was, the determination of the two elder sisters to leave the tyrannical roof which had sheltered them, immediately that the majority of Amelia made such a plan feasible. Rachel had already reached the desired age of one-and-twenty. But Agnes—what was to become of her? Ralph inquired. Was she to be forsaken?

The sisters looked mysterious, but seemed unaccountably indifferent on that point. As for his youngest sister—in the restricted private intercourse he was suffered to have with her during his visit, he was grieved and disappointed to behold the effects which, as he thought, the injudicious, galling treatment, was working upon her temper and demeanour—the reckless, flighty, suspicious manner with which even his kind endeavours to draw her into confidence, or give her gentle remonstrance and advice, were received. He feared the nature of the once gentle, timid girl, had been hopelessly soured and hardened, fully justifying the reports which had reached his ears of the change in her disposition.

It was repugnant to his every feeling of propriety and humanity, the manner in which this change was treated—the further tightening of her galling chain—the frigid tyranny with which she was dealt with. But what could he do? His mother refused even to listen to him on the subject; and his brother, jealous of his influence over the other sisters, with whom, as the joint guardian with their mother, he brooked no intermeddling—declined interceding in the matter.

"My dear Ralph," he at length said,

becoming weary and impatient of his brother's persevering earnestness on the subject, yet willing to keep up an outward show of courtesy towards the brother, whose mild excellency, shining so benignantly amongst the dark spirits surrounding him, even he could not but in some degree respect, "you must be aware that you have no *natural* right to interfere between a mother and her daughter, and no *legal* claim to do so between a ward and her guardians: therefore I advise you to leave alone this fruitless and unnecessary case. Why," he continued, with a self-satisfied sneer, "you will wish next, perhaps, to meddle between me and my wife."

Ralph Beauchamp was silent for a moment or two, as if he certainly hesitated whether or not he ought to speak that which hovered on his lips; but soon he said, firmly, but mildly—

"You speak truly there, Lionel; for whereas I have the warrant of God's word, which all—and especially one of his appointed ministers—are bound to declare to those who seem forgetful of its injunctions—whilst I have the sacred right to sound in my mother's ears, 'Parents, provoke not your children to wrath,' I have also words for you, brother, on the subject you mention. I might perchance tell you, that the husband is to 'love and cherish his wife.'"

"And who would dare to presume—who would be so absurd as to assume that to be necessary in my case?" Mr. Beauchamp interrupted, his eyes gleaming with angry surprise upon his brother. "I think, indeed, that might be the very last injunction to be addressed to me."

"Stop, Lionel: the injunction to which I allude stands thus written—'Love your wife as yourself;' and another—'Be not bitter against her.' 'Let those who are strong, bear with the infirmities of the weak, and *not please themselves.*' Now, there may be conduct which we may deceive ourselves by deeming *love* for another, when *love of self* shows itself alone as its foundation, all-predominant and absorbing—conduct which, under the comfortable pretext of excess of care and fond devotion, may turn a young creature's existence into one bitter trial and constant sacrifice. Lionel, forgive me—forgive what you may truly deem intrusive interference—but I cannot refrain. Your wife is such a sweet, interesting being—so touchingly patient and submissive—"

"Enough!" was the haughty interruption, Mr. Beauchamp rising from his seat. "This is indeed intrusive—impertinent interference, which I cannot suffer."

And the brothers were from that moment *two* for life.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Ay—we are betrothed;
Nay, more, our marriage hour,
With all the cunning manner of our flight,
Determined of—"

Two Gentlemen of Verona.

Two stage-coaches passing nearly at the same time through the straggling village, near the Towers not far from the Lodge-gate, respectively set down at the inn three passengers of no very ordinary description—"tall, likely-looking young gentlemen!" as the hostess would have said.

The two fellow-passengers had just dismounted and ordered their portmanteaus to be carried into the house, when the single traveller sprang down from the conveyance; and though his muffled form and slouched cap, hiding much of his face, seemed to wear some semblance of disguise, they might also have been intended only as a defence against the cold of that January weather—for there was nothing savouring in the least of caution or disguise in the open, fearless manner in which, as his feet touched the ground, he called on the hostler to carry in his luggage also.

"Holloa!" cried the youngest of the two before-mentioned arrivals, moving hastily forward at the sound of the well-known voice, with a gesture of surprise and pleasure—"Gerald, can this be you?"

"By Jove!" exclaimed the other, with quite as much astonishment, though perhaps with less of unmingled delight, pulling up, as he spoke, the military cap from his brow, and revealing indeed the handsome, manly countenance of Gerald Cameron, as the lantern flashed upon it—"why, Alick, as I am alive! Who would have expected this, old fellow?"

"What, Sackville, you also here! How does all this happen?" continued Gerald, in amaze.

"We should rather ask that question of you, I think," Alick replied. "Come in, and tell us what brought you here in such a hurry; for you only could have arrived in England the day before yesterday," he continued, as they entered the inn's best parlour, and approached the bright fire. "I was hastening to meet you in London."

"You—then why are you here? Where did you come from?" Gerald inquired.

"From the Duke's place in ———, where Sackville and I have been shooting for the last week. And why came I here? Oh, the fact is, that none of us have seen Lena for so long, that as it would but delay me a night, turning out of the way to the Towers, I thought I would do so."

"And Sackville and you are going to

spend the night over there?" said Gerald, with rather a blank visage.

"Oh no—not quite that—where are you going, Sackville?"

"Only to see what we can have for dinner," the young man replied, as he left the room.

"Gerald, the fact is," Alick continued, turning again towards his brother, "poor Lena—"

"Good God! she is not ill, I hope?" cried Gerald.

"Oh no—it is not that, as far as we know—another young Beauchamp is expected soon—but the truth is, none of us have seen her lately—never since my father and mother were there, nearly a year ago. They are all perfectly wretched about her, my mother broken-hearted; and I determined, before I went back to Ireland, I would have some personal account to take them about her; and resolved am I to do so. I therefore intend walking up after their dinner, and desiring to see her for an hour alone. I do not wish to break bread or sleep a single night under her husband's roof, but I *will* see my sister—as her brother, they shall not prevent me. Gerald, did the spirit move you to do the same, or were you audacious enough to propose offering yourself as a guest in this lion's den?"

"Yes—no—something of the sort. I thought I would just run down here and have a look," Gerald said, incoherently.

"Well, I shall not be sorry to have you to back me; and if you are up to staying there longer, so much the better. I cannot well leave Sackville alone, and of course he neither could nor would intrude himself uninvited; he only accompanied me here out of kindness. That poor dear girl! I am miserable about her—shut up from us all in this way;" and Alick sadly leant his head upon his hand.

Gerald, pacing the room uneasily, began asking more general information relative to his family at large, his mind evidently strongly divided by some more pressing and present subject of interest.

The circumstances of his case were certainly fraught with no small degree of agitation and anxiety, as our readers will easily imagine when let into his secrets. Gerald Cameron was the creature of impulse—of quick excitement. Perhaps few would have blamed him very severely if the flame lighted up in his generous nature—the pity kindled into love for the poor ill-treated Agnes—had as quickly died away. Some might have deemed it not inexcusable if the vows and promises into which he had been surprised by the excitement of the moment had as quickly passed away from his remembrance. But Gerald Cameron, the creature of impulse, was also the soul of honour—words

once gone forth from his lips were bonds; and neither change of time, scene, nor circumstances had the effect of causing him to consider the professions whispered in the young girl's ears otherwise than sacred vows. That parting kiss still lingered on his lips—as a charm not to be cancelled without shame and dishonour—a pledge which there heeded not even the jetty tress in his possession to remind him by its more sensible presence of all he had pledged himself to perform. Thus, as he dared not, for the poor girl's sake, attempt any communication by letter, all that had passed between them in any way calculated to keep alive his own steadfastness and her faith and hope during the interval of separation had been the line traced by Agnes in Annie's letter, and the guarded answer conveyed by him in one to Lena—

"Remember me, I beg—kindly, if it will not be considered a liberty—to the Miss Beauchamps; in particular to Miss Agnes, with whom I am more intimately acquainted. I can never forget my friends." Then immediately adding—"In January I hope certainly to return to England. Now, dear Lena, do not, as is generally the custom, consider it quite unnecessary to fulfil my commission just stated. You know not how tenacious one feels in a foreign land, surrounded by strangers, of being remembered by English friends, especially by ladies fair."

This had been sufficient for both purposes. Over the few lines of Agnes's, which, by their trembling, unstudied character, spoke to his heart and eye all the fluttered emotions which dictated them, he renewed his vows of love and fidelity.

And she—oh, who could paint the ecstacy, the tears, the hysterical laughter, with which the girl, when she had obtained possession of the bit of paper on which—as if for that purpose—her lover had written the postscript, which contained his last quoted passage, fled with it into privacy, and gloated over its contents.

From that day—it was but some months before the January in question—the state of irritable excitement in which Agnes existed is not to be described. And much did it increase as she saw the time so ardently expected drawing near. That which at a distance had been the romantic dream, in which all risk, danger, and difficulty was set at naught, began now to assume the form of substantial reality—beset with a host of formidable impediments, doubts, uncertainties, and terrors.

How would it all be? Would Gerald really come to her, deliverance—how fly to meet him? And then the dreadful chance of failure—of discovery—ruin!

For what would be the consequence of her mother's rage if such disasters should

occur? What retribution would she consider sufficient for such an offence?

Her sisters could not assist her much. Rachel resisted her desperate wish to write to Gerald. She deemed it would be highly improper on Agnes's part to make any further advances. If Gerald were a man of honour, he would redeem his pledge—and the Camerons were all honourable people—she must wait. So waited she had—but with no patient spirit. Even her mother, in the wretched girl's desperate state of mind and feeling, failed to impress her with the abject terror of yore; and Agnes drew upon herself, by her reckless contempt of her authority and threats, the extremest rigour of maternal law.

It was but the very same day that we find the young Camerons at the roadside inn that Agnes had been released from solitary confinement, and the discipline appeared to have produced its due effect, for she had issued from it on the morning of the above-said day, tame and submissive to a degree—at least to all appearance—desirous, even eager, to fulfil the tasks and duties imposed upon her.

That same night the governess and the pupil were together in the schoolroom: all was stillness in that remote part of the mansion. The elder sisters, as usual, were spending the evening below. Miss Ricketts, still an invalid, was seated on one side of the fireplace, in an easy chair, the only seat coming at all under the denomination allowed within that chamber of penance.

Agnes occupied one of the more straight-backed pieces of furniture, supplied for the use of the pupils. A book was in her hand. Suddenly she lowered her book, and her eyes looked towards Miss Ricketts.

There was something peculiar in that look. It was neither the timid, piteous glance, of earlier days, when Agnes was a gentle, frightened child, nor was it one of sullen, sulky vindictiveness or open impertinence, to which the governess was accustomed, by the more recent demeanour of the young girl.

With the same expression of countenance, her eye travelled with interest around that dismal apartment, as if every long familiar hated object had suddenly changed their aspect; even as the prisoner has been known to gaze, on the eve of liberation, around his before loathed prison, and to feel a pang of such a complicated nature as that which saddened her countenance, when again her glance fixed itself upon the governess.

The softened expression visible therein struck even Miss Ricketts's jaundiced perception—and she was marvelling in silence what it might signify, when she was still more startled by the sudden apostrophe of her pupil.

"Miss Ricketts, how do you feel to-night?"

The governess looked at Agnes, at first puzzled and perplexed by the degree of unwonted interest implied not only in the words, but in the earnest tone in which they were spoken. But then, as if suspicious that some treason lurked beneath, she answered, shortly and sharply—

"Pretty well, I thank you, Miss Agnes."

"You look ill," continued the pupil; and there was a sound of kind feeling in the girl's voice, which the heart of the poor worn-out governess, weakened by illness, could not quite resist; and it checked the first ungracious impulse which prompted her to interpret this attention into—"She wishes me to go to bed."

"That cannot concern you much, Miss Agnes, nor grieve you much either, I should think."

"Yes, indeed it does, Miss Ricketts, now," Agnes replied, with emotion.

"Now, and pray why?" the governess demanded, looking somewhat surprised.

"Because—because," murmured Agnes, with rising agitation, "I—forgive you, Miss Ricketts, for all you have made me suffer;" and she rose from her seat and approached the amazed governess, and kissed her contracted forehead, which for many a long year had never felt the pressure of human lips; "and I hope you will forgive me all my many offences towards you. If you had been more gentle, perhaps—but that does not matter now;" and her nervous emotion increasing, Agnes stopped short and wept hysterically.

Miss Ricketts was thunderstruck. She thought her own death must surely be very near, or her pupil's mind distraught.

"Sit down, Miss Agnes!" she said; "compose yourself, or I must send for Lady Rachel."

Agnes, with a glance of terror at that last threat, resumed her seat, but not her former efforts to composure—an anxious, eager, listening look was in her distended eyes, and pale face.

She started wildly when the door opened to admit the still-room maid, who entered, saying that she had come to ask what Miss Ricketts would please to fancy for supper. She approached and stood between the governess and her pupil.

A look and a movement of the woman's lips, as for one moment she turned her head towards the latter, caused Agnes to spring to her feet, with a scarcely smothered cry, but as speedily to sink back; and till Jane had left the room, in that attitude she remained.

Then rising, she murmured, in a hurried, scarce audible tone—

"If you please—I must go to bed—I am ill;" and mechanically Agnes put forth her hand—but not able to await with pro-

priety the cold, suspiciously delayed return, or the severely conveyed permission, impatiently she waved her hand, and burst from the governess's presence.

CHAPTER XIX.

"And now, fair dames, methinks I see
You listen to my minstrelsy;
Your waving locks ye backward throw,
And sidelong bend your necks of snow:
Ye wend to hear a melting tale,
Of two true lovers in a dale."
The Lay of the Last Minstrel.

WE will now return to the two at the Beauchamp Arms, who, soon after young Sackville rejoined his companions, sat down to as comfortable a dinner as the inn could afford, to satisfy the appetites of three hungry travellers. Yet neither of the trio talked or laughed, or ate, with the hearty zest natural to their age and circumstances.

Soon after the repast was over, Alick sprung up, saying,

"Well, Gerald, what do you think about moving? Sackville, will you walk down with us, or stay here and 'take thine ease in thine inn' till I return?"

"Oh, I'll go and have a look at the outside of the Towers—it seems a fine moonlight night," replied Sackville, hurriedly.

"Well, Gerald, what do you think about moving?" Alick again said, looking for his great-coat.

But Gerald still stood in a thoughtful attitude, with his back to the fire.

"Well, I'll walk down with you," he answered, rousing himself; "but I have changed my mind, and won't go in."

"Not go in and see Lena!" Alick cried in surprise.

"Not go in and see your sister!" Sackville seemed by his countenance to echo.

"No, I think not—I'll wait to-night, at any rate."

"But Lena will think it so extraordinary," argued Alick.

"No, she won't—besides, she does not know I am here. I shall see her shortly. I dare say," Gerald added, somewhat mysteriously, as he equipped himself for the intended walk. "Now, come along!" and the two sallied forth together.

Gerald was rallied on the way by both his companions on his mysterious, unaccountable determination; they declared he was afraid of Lady Rachel. Alick still persisted how strange his conduct would appear to Lena.

"For I cannot hide from her that I have seen you, if, as she is sure to do, she inquires concerning your expected return."

Still Gerald was impenetrable on that point. He laughed and whistled away the subject, and grew excited in spirits, till

suddenly, between the moonlit trees, they caught a view of the heavy turreted Towers, lying dark and massive in the shade, a light only here and there gleaming from its windows, like the glimmer which proclaimed the Ogre's Castle to the benighted traveller in the fairy tales.

"Well, we had better make a halt here!" Gerald said, as a more open view of the house was gained, "One word, Alick;" and passing his arm within his brother's he drew him on a few paces, whilst he said, in a low voice, "Alick, do me a favour; if possible, do not mention my being here to Lena, or any one in the house. I have a particular reason, which I cannot explain now."

"My dear Gerald, there is some mystery in all this," Alick answered.

"Well, never mind, my good fellow, you are not concerned in it; so only leave me alone, if you please, and act and speak as if you had never met me in this deuced unlucky way—now go on with you. Poor darling Lena! I should have liked to see her, but it could not be helped," and he turned round to rejoin Sackville, murmuring to himself—

"It cannot be to-night, certainly. He shall not be implicated in the affair. He must be safe out of the way—and then, poor little treasure, I will make haste and carry her off as fast as she likes from that wretched, cursed jail-house of hers."

Gerald found Sackville standing—the pale moonbeams falling upon his melancholy countenance, gazing earnestly upon the mansion, as if he too possessed some treasure within the gloomy walls.

Truly no callous feelings moved within the young man's breast—for he did feel that there indeed was buried his heart's first and only love. It was a pure harmless feeling of romance—the same spirit which had brought him there to gaze upon the spot where dwelt the lady of his love, and the poetic simple thoughts which filled his mind, would have wronged no one within that mansion—meet and fitting tributes for the pure, the spotless being, on whom they fell.

The dreamer was drawn from his abstraction by the voice of the wide-awake, unmeditating Gerald.

"Sackville, we had better walk back, or we may have Lady Rachel's bloodhounds (for she *must* have bloodhounds) upon us; and as you are a romantic fellow, I'll let you into a secret of mine—quite as good as any novel, you will say. But, joking apart—seriously, my good fellow—for it is a most grand matter, I assure you—listen to me, and 'I'll a tale unfold,' which will astonish you not a little. I am come here to run away with young Agnes Beauchamp!"

Sackville looked indeed astonished—incredulous.

"You are not serious, Cameron?"

"Serious—yes, serious enough, I can tell you. You shall hear all about it."

And Gerald's story was told as they paced back through the park.

But the concluding facts in explanation of his present position are necessary to be detailed.

Gerald's first thought on landing in England was Agnes. His pledge and promise—they must be fulfilled, and speedily too. His was not a spirit to delay, and hesitate, and postpone.

But Gerald was, at the same time, not a little puzzled as to the way and means. So strictly confined and overlooked was Agnes, that the difficulty consisted in how to manage a meeting or any communication necessary for the arrangement of the affair. His quick wit and ready invention served Gerald at this juncture.

He remembered poor Agnes, in her Beechy Place revelations, mentioning the name of "Jane Pratt," as the confidential purveyor to all the clandestine backstairs proceedings of her sisters.

So, taking the chance of the aforesaid Jane Pratt being still at the Towers, he wrote a letter to Agnes, enclosed in a cover, directed in the still-room maid's lover style of penmanship, to "Jane Pratt," with the following lines—

"JANE PRATT,

"I will give you ten bright sovereigns, if you will give the enclosed safely and secretly into Miss Agnes Beauchamp's hands. I know you are always a friend to the young ladies in their times of need—be so in the present instance, and you will have gained another friend for life, in—

GERALD CAMERON."

Nothing more need be related than that Jane Pratt proved "a friend indeed." Not only was the letter delivered into the ecstatic Agnes's own hands in secrecy and safety, but with eager interest and zest did Jane enter into, and pledge herself to aid and abet to the extent of her ability, the lovers' cause.

She was an active, quick-witted creature, fond of all kinds of gossip, frolic, and adventure, moreover attached and disinterested, needing no bribe to make her a sworn ally in such a cause to one of her young ladies. No fear of Lady Rachel's wrath could move her. She could but lose her place, and she would as soon have become at any moment, maid of all work to Rachel or Agnes—her two favourites, whom she pitied from the bottom of her kind heart.

So—to cut the matter short—on this memorable night now in question, Jane Pratt might have been seen issuing from a door leading from the offices, about eight

o'clock, to meet and negotiate with Gerald Cameron, who was expected to arrive, as we see he did, at the Beauchamp Arms by that hour. How and why she proceeded so short a distance on her way, and returned so speedily to the school-room to inquire concerning Miss Rickett's supper, we shall presently see.

When Alick Cameron parted from his companions, he had entered the court surrounding the front of the mansion, and was just raising his eyes to survey the gloomy edifice into which he was about to enter, an unbidden guest, when he heard a footstep hastily approaching towards him, and soon perceived that it was a female figure in a bonnet and shawl, who, stopping at a little distance beneath the shadow of the wall, was beckoning him that he should approach her.

Thinking that the woman must have mistaken him for some one else, he was about to disregard those signals, by turning to approach the hall-door, when, coming still nearer, and redoubling her endeavours to engage his attention, he heard her whisper distinctly—

"Mr. Cameron—Mr. Cameron! You must not go there, for the world, sir. This way, if you please!" And the astonished, puzzled Alick, mechanically obeying her authoritative directions, followed her steps along the left wing of the mansion, from which she had appeared, till, having turned a corner, they stood at a door leading apparently into some of the domestic offices.

"What does this mean, my good woman? Am I expected?" Alick began.

"Expected! Sir? yes, sir! I was just going up to the village to see if you had come. My poor young lady is in an awful state to see you—it was very venturesome to come to the front door; but as you are here, I can get you upstairs to have a talk as well, and as safe as possible, if you'll follow me."

More perplexed and mystified than ever, Alick thought to himself—

"Can it be Lena of whom she speaks? is it possible that her husband's jealous tyranny has arrived at such a point, as to oblige her to make use of artifices to obtain an interview even with her brother?"

In the mean time, Jane Pratt pushed open the door that admitted them into a sort of wash-house or scullery; and throwing aside her walking apparel into a corner and smoothing her cap, showed herself a remarkably good-looking woman of about thirty. She put her finger to her lips as he was about again to beg for a more explicit explanation with regard to this most mysterious, unaccountable means of introduction into his sister's home; but having lighted a candle from the lamp suspended from the ceiling of a passage,

into which the entrance led, she quickly preceded the young man through dimly lighted vault-like passages—the sound from the doors around plainly indicating the vicinity to be the offices of the mansion—but without encountering any one; and then they ascended a winding staircase—traversing more passages—up more steps—cross questions and crooked answers passing between Alick and his *cicerone*, tending to put the former more in the dark, and to render the latter less sensible of any mistake under which she might be labouring, whilst so eagerly and securely pursuing her undertaking.

At length, close to the landing-place of a last flight of steps, she paused at a door, opened it, and ushered Alick into a room; smiled a congratulatory and well pleased smile, and with a significant nod, left him alone.

It was the play-room, in which the hero of this adventure now unconsciously found himself. He looked around him, wondering where he was, and what was to happen next. There was nothing in the aspect of the chamber to enlighten him as to its character—indeed, it would have presented rather a puzzling appearance to any eye. Almost carpetless—comfortless as it seemed legitimately intended to be—the fire burning dimly in the grate—the thread-bare appearance of the small old turkey carpet laid down near it—the strange and whimsical collection of old furniture of various ages—evidently drawn from a long banishment to the lumber room, for the use of this disregarded room—all around showed the apartment to be inhabited, though by what class of individuals it would be hard to guess.

Alick could scarcely think it was his sister who occupied it; yet he thought—by whom else could he be expected, and whose, but his Lena's, could be the light step which soon echoed along the passage—whose, the young voice, he heard murmur in indistinct accents, some whispered sentence of inquiry from without.

The question was in reality thus—

"Is it really he?"

And the answer,

"Yes, Miss! cheer up—your lover to be sure it is, and if ever there was an angel in the shape of a lover, he is one."

The listener, however, distinguished not the words, and half opened his arms, as the door was eagerly but tremblingly thrown open, and through the partial darkness of the room, a form had soon flown within them wildly, yet timidly. Like a young antelope, she bounded into his embrace, and hid her head on his bosom.

But how was all this? If this momentary vision of the pale, dark girl who had flown into his presence, had not plainly convinced him that it was not his

fair lily sister—the dark silken hair, over which he bent in momentary bewilderment, but still more, perhaps, the true instinct of his heart, revealed fully his mistake. The young man stepped back, gently, yet effectually releasing himself from his fair burden.

Yes, she stood thus alone before her supposed lover, gazing up into his face, confused murmurs only issuing from her parted, quivering lips; the first flush of agitation and emotion rendering her insensible to the unlovenlike movement which had thus repelled her, and blinding her to any want of identity she might have discerned in the beautiful, but astonished countenance of the tall figure before her.

But the cold word of—"Mistake"—the still colder glance, could they long refrain from arousing her from her happy unconsciousness? No! Rising with an expression of dismay, she hid her burning brow upon her tightly clenched hands, and gasped—

"Oh, why then did you come, if it is but to look thus upon me? Mistake! oh, no: am I then so changed? It is Agnes herself—Agnes changed, perhaps with waiting—longing—weeping for your return—and now you *are* come to tell her you do not know her—to disown her—to break the promise on which she has existed ever since you left her."

"This is very strange—are you really aware who I am, young lady?" Alick began, with distressed concern and embarrassment, but with gentle, delicate kindness of tone and manner, so peculiarly his own—"May I ask *who* you take me for? Look at me again, and you will perhaps be undeceived."

At the sound of his voice, in which, indeed, there was a slightly strange and unfamiliar tone, Agnes lifted up her eyes, and gazed with startled uncertainty upon her companion's face. But the scrutiny seemed but to increase the irritating uncertainty of the bewildered, excited girl.

"Yes! it is he most certainly—yet no—it is like him—so like—yet so different! His eyes—his hair—his mouth—I know them all so well. And yet he looks upon me so differently—so coldly—and he is thinner, paler. Ah, how is all this? Is it really—really?—He must be dead," she cried, with hysterical, passionate terror; "he said he was like an angel, and this is his spirit come to kill me too."

Alick looked with kind pity upon her, and said softly and distinctly—

"I am Alick Cameron, Miss Beauchamp: I do not think I ever had the pleasure of meeting you before."

"Alick Cameron? not Gerald?" she faintly shrieked—subdued in a moment into more reasonablelike dismay and confusion. Hiding her face in her hands, and

stamping her little foot in passionate distress, she murmured, "But how is this? why did you come here? I am lost—undone!"

Suspicious, approaching to the truth, by this time suggested themselves to Alick's mind; Gerald's unexpected and mysterious journey to the Towers so soon after his arrival in England—his evident discomfort at meeting himself and Sackville! It was all startling and scarcely credible; but that Gerald was connected with the adventure into which he had been so erroneously drawn, was most certain, and of its nature there was but one interpretation.

"No! I am not Gerald," he said. "My brother—"

"Where—oh where is he?" cried Agnes, springing up, once more forgetful of all else; with clasped hands, and wild beseeching eyes. "Oh tell me—tell me—is he come?"

"My brother arrived this evening at the village inn, at the same time as I did," Alick answered, hesitatingly; for he scarcely knew what should be his course of conduct in this new and puzzling situation.

A gleam of renovated joy shone in Agnes's eyes.

"And what am I to do?" she murmured, as she stood, breathless and eager as a young hart, ready to start at the first sound of the hunter's horn, and looked at Alick as if for aid. But she met only his cold, quiet, unanswering gaze.

"I am not in my brother's secrets, Miss Beauchamp, therefore I fear I can be of little service. Perchance you will be so good as to tell me," he continued, glancing towards the door, "what I had better do? Perhaps my guide will reconduct me, by the way I came, that I may enter and introduce myself in more proper form, by the front entrance. Do you not think this would be better?" he added, with a gentle, encouraging smile, considerably intended to allay a little of the confusion by which the young creature seemed now overwhelmed.

"You will not betray us?" she asked, imploringly, her head bent low upon her bosom, "oh, in mercy, do not ruin me for ever!"

"I think I had better return to Gerald at once," Alick ejaculated, aloud, "and see—"

Agnes gasped eagerly—quickly lifting up her head at these words—"Take me to him!"

"Miss Beauchamp, you do not consider what you ask of me," Alick answered, gravely. "No—no; really," he added, shaking his head, with a half smile, "you cannot be serious."

He bowed, and was turning away, when a stifled shriek burst from Agnes's lips. She clung to his cloak, and gasped—

"Save me—save me!"

For a murmur of voices had fallen upon her ear from without, and *one* voice——!

What spirit of mischief had been afloat that night, and moved the Lady Rachel, at that unusual hour, to look after the concerns of her governess and youngest daughter? for she it too truly was, who in another moment stood facing Agnes and Alick Cameron.

That her Ladyship's eyes glared upon the scene presenting itself to her sight, without power to credit that they saw aright, may easily be supposed. To find her daughter under circumstances of any such nature, was of itself a sufficient crime—but that she should behold in her audacious companion, her modest, unobjectionable youth, Alick Cameron, was a stunning and incomprehensible discovery.

But Lady Rachel was not one to remain very long under any such passive influence. In another instant—with the gripe of a vice—she had seized her trembling daughter's slight arm, and severed her from the protection to which she still clung; then with a withering sneer of suppressed rage, her Ladyship turned from one to the other of the culprits, and begged to know what all this meant.

"I am almost as much at a loss as yourself, Madam," the young man answered, calmly, and with dignity. "My position must indeed seem to you—as it did to myself, a minute ago—most strangely unaccountable, and suspicious—but let me beg you to believe that the interview, in which you have surprised this young lady and myself, was equally unsought for, or desired by both your daughter and myself, as you may suppose, considering that this is the first time I ever beheld Miss Beauchamp, and, as far as I am aware, she never having before seen your humble servant."

Lady Rachel stood in stern silence. Alick therefore continued—

"Having occasion to pass this way, *en route* from the Duke of Stratheden's, and wishing to see my sister before I returned to Ireland, I made bold to walk over from the inn where I am putting up for the night, for the purpose of requesting to be allowed to spend with her an hour of this evening; I can assure your Ladyship, that she was the only person into whose presence I had the presumption to desire to introduce myself," and Alick bowed with the same calm dignity, with which he had accounted for his conduct. He was called upon for the sake of others, to proceed no further.

"Some great mistake, no doubt!" her Ladyship rejoined, turning with a blasting sneer of bitter irony upon Agnes; "one which this innocent young lady may perhaps explain. Will you favour me, ma-

dam, by informing me how—if this young gentleman's statement be true—how you and your worshipful allies (for such you must possess) have contrived to introduce Mr. Cameron into your fair company, rather than into the presence which he originally sought? These are indeed pretty doings to be carried on in a respectable house amongst *my daughters*! That fool—that poor, worn-out fool, Ricketts, sitting over her gruel, with such things passing at her very elbow! But speak, madam, I command you—clear yourself—or——"

"Let go my arm, mother!" Agnes murmured moodily, writhing beneath her grasp, more from the pain it inflicted, than from mental fright—for she was goaded on to reckless desperation. "What he tells you is true," she said: "it was not my fault, more than his, that he was brought here. It was a mistake—I did not want *him*."

"Want *him*—who then, pray, madam? A mistake?—then there was some one you *did* want?" and Lady Rachel shook her daughter's arm with increased vehemence.

"May I be allowed, madam, to retire?" interposed Alick, hurt and disgusted with so shocking an exposure, and very sorry for the poor girl. "I regret extremely that I should have been the cause of so distressing a scene; but as you have been, I hope, in a satisfactory manner, convinced that it is all a strange mistake, I hope your anger towards your daughter will cease. Here is a letter from the Duchess to my sister, if you wish for any further proof of——"

"*Satisfactory manner!*" interrupted Lady Rachel, turning towards Alick with an effort at something like dignified composure. "Yes, Sir, as far as concerns your part in the mistake, certainly so—I have no reason to doubt the perfect truth of the statement, this young lady so ingeniously confirms," she added with bitter irony, "that it was not *you* she wanted. Yes, I think we have sufficiently exposed ourselves before you. You have had a tolerable specimen of what can be going forward in a decent establishment, to tell the world to wonder no longer at a mother's need of scrutiny over *her daughters*! Mr. Cameron, I will send some one to conduct you elsewhere. And you—come with me, madam!" And Lady Rachel dragged Agnes with her from the apartment, but at the door was faced by Jane Pratt.

"My lady—my lady, listen to me if you please—it was all my fault—indeed it was."

"Your fault, woman!—oh, you are the kind pander to the Miss Beauchamps' frolics—I have had a hint of this before; but speak, and then leave the house forever, without an hour's delay."

"My lady, Miss Ricketts will tell you that Miss Agnes was ill to-night—quite light-headed—I was really frightened; I ran out to see if I could find Mr. Hobson, who is attending one of the servants, and who sometimes comes in to see Miss Ricketts at this time. I saw, sure enough, a gentleman about his height and make, walking up to the house, so I brought him in, and up here without looking at him. He was all muffled up in his cloak, and I didn't even give him time to know where he was, and what I was doing. I showed him in here, not knowing Miss Agnes was in the room, whilst I went to look for her, and tell Miss Ricketts."

"A pretty likely story!—but no doubt Mr. Hobson's company would suit you or Miss Agnes's taste exactly. Ill, indeed!—and you presuming to take upon yourself the care of my daughter's health! What business have you here at all? I will find some other means of curing her, than by sending for that jackanapes of an apothecary. This affair shall be sifted to the bottom—this 'den of meanness and deceit, with all its useless lumber, cleared out," she added, glancing at the unfortunate governess, who had come forth, vainly endeavouring, with her feeble voice, to add her meed of indignation and scolding. "And as for you, Miss Agnes—your light head shall be steadied, trust me. Your brother shall soon be with you."

"Oh, no—no, pray!" gasped Agnes in sudden return of terror; for there was something in her brother which exercised a greater power over her mind, than even the violence of her mother—something in the calm glassy expression of his cold light-blue eye, when angry, before which she quailed, more than before the dark furious glare of her mother's black orbs. She felt as if her secret were as good as revealed, and Gerald lost to her for ever!

With violence which cast her to the ground, Agnes was flung into the closet where she slept—the key turned upon her, then withdrawn—and the miserable girl left alone, stunned and almost fainting.

CHAPTER XX.

"Patience and sorrow strove
Who should express her goodliest."
King Lear.

LADY RACHEL paused before the door of the room, where Alick still impatiently remained, and requested him to follow her.

With her ruffled plumes smoothed in a degree, she conducted him in silence to the other part of the mansion—till arrived at the library, her Ladyship requested him to enter, till she could ascertain if

Mrs. Beauchamp were prepared to receive his most unexpected visit; and having thus rid herself of the incumbrance, towards whom she had been surprised into something more approaching to civility than was her natural wont, her Ladyship again rallied her powers of wrath, and proceeded to the drawing-room. She entered there, upon a very different scene to that of her late performance. A profound silence reigned in the apartment, which, though as being appropriated to common use, was one of the smallest of the sitting-rooms, was still stately and grand, both from its size and style of furniture; whilst the bright lamp, condensed upon the portion of the chamber occupied, left the rest in partial gloom and obscurity.

At a table rather uncomfortably removed from the fire, sat the two Miss Beauchamps, working, or rather resting from their monotonous labours during the temporary relief afforded them by their mother's absence; whilst a luxurious damask cushioned couch, as commodiously situated as to warmth, held their two companions, Mr. Beauchamp and his wife, the former bending over his newspaper, whilst the pale light of the shaded lamp on the little table by the sofa, fell upon the countenance of Lena.

The reflection perhaps greatly contributed to the almost transparent delicacy her features seemed to bear—the almost unnatural purity of the "scarcely tinted cheek," shaded by the pale gold drooping hair; and the expression on her countenance, as with patient industry her slight white fingers wove her silken net-work, was meek, but tinged with sadness, and a dreamy abstracted look of care or painful thought.

Lady Rachel, by her entrance, changed the aspect of the scene within, as the dark threatening thunder-cloud transforms the quiet landscape.

Rachel and Amelia especially, conscience-stricken, and long suspicious of the ominous absence of their mother, trembled, with some pretty clear ideas of what the sight betokened. Mr. Beauchamp looked up with a cold glance of inquiry, whilst Lena, but too used to scenes such as now seemed threatening, merely drooped her head resignedly, to await, like some prescient flower, the passing over of the tempest.

But how quickly did she raise it—with what startled eagerness—when through the passionate outburst of Lady Rachel's lips, the enraged mother made known to Lena's astonished and scarcely crediting ears, that a brother was in the house. The strange story to which this announcement formed but a part, was as nothing to her—that he was there was quite enough—how he came, she cared not.

Lena arose with the intention of immediately seeking him.

"Stay, Lena; I should first like to hear more of this unaccountable story!" her husband said; "this extraordinary arrival and entrance of your brother."

And poor Lena had to wait and listen to the puzzling history of the furious Lady Rachel—of Agnes having been found clinging to her brother's cloak—his explanation—Agnes's self-accusation—her Ladyship's invectives and assertions against her other daughters—met with denials from them—before her earnest entreaties were attended to, and Mr. Beauchamp, promising his mother to return to talk over the affair, somewhat sullenly and reluctantly prepared to conduct her himself to the library.

As coldly as was consistent with civility, he listened to the explanation which, after his first earnest, tender greeting with his sister, Alick thought proper to give of his appearance at the Towers—his desire to carry to his parents some *personal* account of their daughter. On his other adventure he but slightly touched, merely mentioning it as a mistake which had occurred.

Mr. Beauchamp did not press the matter further; indeed it seemed to be his wish to have as few words as possible with his *wife's* relation; and merely remarking, with a freezing, supercilious smile, that he trusted Mr. Cameron would find no very distressing materials for his desired report, retired.

As may be imagined, the subject uppermost in Alick's mind at that moment was the discovery so curiously made by him, concerning Gerald, and that, forgetful or inattentive to the parting injunction he had received to maintain silence with regard to his movements, his first impulse would be to impart the whole matter to his sister, before many minutes had elapsed of their agitated interview. Poor Lena! with what dismay she listened to his revelations—at first thunderstruck—then, with earnest agitation, entreating her brother to fly and prevent Gerald from attempting to carry a rash design into execution, which must injure them all so greatly; if it were possible that it could *really* have been planned. But how—when! was to her a most complete mystery—it seemed almost an impossibility.

Alick assured her that it was his intention to do so—and calmed and reassured Lena in a degree; for he wished not to lose the chief purpose of his visit, namely, to gain some particular and satisfactory information concerning her own self.

"Indeed, Lena!" he said, with an anxious tender smile, gazing into her face; "Indeed, I feel but too much inclined to carry you off with me to Ireland."

There was something in this speech which overcame Lena's feelings, for tears gushed from her eyes.

"Lena!" the young man continued in an agitated tone, pressing her hands in his, after a moment's pause, "my darling, sweetest Lena, if I thought you were not happy here—that the constraint which seems to surround you, and keeps you from free communication with those you love, made you miserable—by Heaven! I would not scruple to take you home—if not by fair means, by force or fraud. Nay, Lena, do not look so shocked or frightened—we will not allow your heart to be broken; you shall come home if the cursed tyranny of these people makes you wretched."

"Alick, dear Alick, is it you who speaks thus? my calm—good, wise brother!" Lena answered, with a surprised mild expression; "I should have thought it was my impetuous, thoughtless Gerald who uttered such things. To run away with a young lady from her home is bad enough; but to think it possible that a young married woman—a wife, a mother—could run away from her husband; oh, for shame Alick!" and she tried to smile a playful reproach.

"But why will they not let you visit your family? why is our intercourse with you so restricted? Do you not wish for our society, Lena? Oh, I am sure you do; I know you too well. I know that it is a trial you must feel most bitterly; far more than were you ill-treated—persecuted in any other way. I know well," he continued, in a hurried manner, his feelings almost overwhelming him; "I know that all this senseless grandeur cannot make up for the total loss of our society."

"No, Alick!" Lena answered, weeping, "I own there is much truth in what you say—but yet, dear brother, you must not speak so to me; I must not hear it. It would be very wrong—Mr. Beauchamp loved me, and married me and is very generous in giving me all he thinks necessary for my happiness; I ought not to expect to be without my share of trials and cares—to be as happy, Alick, as I was in my own dear home. I must bear it all with patience, these trials peculiar to the state and circumstances in which I am placed! all I can do is to hope for brighter days—I mean, for days which shall be made bright by more frequent enjoyment of all those I so dearly love—that would indeed make them bright! My darling father, my dear beautiful mother—and all my brothers and sisters! How long it indeed seems, since I have seen them! And the sweet younger ones—my own pet, Cecil. I almost forget what his merry face is like."

Alick promised her, that she should have her mind relieved on the subject of Agnes by seeing or hearing from him early on the morrow. In the mean time she was convinced that at least till the

story was more confirmed, it would be injudicious to raise alarm and excite suspicions on the subject. She therefore retired to rest with the concealment weighing heavily on her mind.

Her husband had not, however, exposed her to much agitation by pressing her on the particulars connected with her brother's visit. She had shown him the kind affectionate letter from the Duchess, which referred to the purpose of Alick's visit; and this perhaps in a measure deterred him from invidious remarks, and even induced him to vouchsafe to say, that Alick and Mr. Sackville had better have slept at the Towers, as they would have found there, more commodious lodgings, he would have imagined, than at the village inn.

Mr. Beauchamp but slightly alluded to the business concerning Agnes—then inveighing with some ill-humour on the trouble and annoyance he was so constantly undergoing, from the squabbles of his sisters with their mother, and expressing his determination that some severe and decisive measure should be taken on the morrow, to bring Agnes to reason. Meantime she was supposed to be locked up for the night, safe, and undisturbed in her dark cell; the key of which had been thrown by Lady Rachel at the feet of Miss Ricketts, with the imperative command, that the door should not be opened, till she so ordered it.

The unfortunate governess picked it up, and laid it on the schoolroom table, whilst she retired to put on her flannel dressing-gown and night-cap; in that time Jane Pratt, on removing the gruel cup, substituted another key in the place of the original, which Miss Ricketts, on her return to the apartment, carried with her to her couch, satisfied that the late disturbance had at any rate frightened the play-room revellers from their usual haunt, for all was quiet and in darkness. Her sleep through the night, poor creature! was broken by restless, wakeful starts, and still she thought she was dreaming, when the candle of the schoolroom maid awoke her to the light, or rather darkness of another day; and not till shakes, and screams in the ear left her without possibility of believing it to be a waking certainty, could she be brought to think it aught but a wild dream which told her, that "Miss Agnes was not in bed—not with her sisters—not anywhere; her door had been found open, and the room empty."

Then, indeed, the poor woman made haste to arise, felt for the key, and with it in her hand, like a risen ghost, hurried to her pupil's door. Open indeed it was, and the bird flown.

Into the sisters' room she rushed—

shook and—questioned them as they sat up in bed—Rachel with pale but somewhat suspicious composure, Amelia exclaiming, with forced agitation—

"Goodness! gracious! what can have become of her? How very odd—how very strange!"

Then bells were rung, and the alarm spread amongst the servants, speedily reaching the higher regions.

Lady Rachel soon stood at her son's bed-side; with a voice of thunder roaring the astounding news into the ears of the bewildered pair; and Mr. Beauchamp had soon accompanied his mother to the scene of action.

Lena, too, had arisen: but the consummation of the dire suspicion which had been excited in Alick and herself—the distress of mind caused by the idea of the blame which such knowledge might attach to her; more than all, the terrible certainty of the further breach which her brother's offence must necessarily interpose between herself and her family—all these anxious, miserable feelings, affected her so powerfully, that when her maid came, in the midst of the general confusion, to see after her own poor young mistress, she found her in a state which, considering her situation, was not a little dangerous. Indeed, Lena soon became so ill, that the servant deemed it necessary to send a message to Mr. Beauchamp, requesting that medical advice might be summoned. In short, it ended, that in the noon tide hour Mr. Beauchamp was awaiting in deep anxiety the safety of his beloved wife, whose premature confinement was hourly expected, instead of attending to the passionate commands of his mother, that he should put four horses to the carriage, and fly in pursuit of "the" We will not expose her Ladyship by adding a list of all the anathematizing epithets she bestowed on her fugitive daughter.

However, in the mean time, an interview had taken place between Lady Rachel and Alick. The latter had contented himself with allowing matters to rest as they were for the night, being at least satisfied that there was no reason to apprehend any immediate *escapade* on the part of his mad brother; with whom he was as nearly quarrelling, in the conference they had together on the subject (for meddling with a man's love affairs is like touching sharp-edged tools), as ever he had been in his life. Sackville also informed him that Gerald had, from the first moment of meeting his brother, given up the plan of taking any measures that night—indeed, had confided to him the whole affair, in order that he might withdraw Alick from the scene of action without fail on the morrow; so that no member of

his family should be implicated in the events that would ensue. Well! the next morning proved to Alick that his brother had outwined him, and to repair to the Towers was his immediate impulse.

It was now both his duty to reveal all he knew of the affair, and to relieve Lena from the weight of responsibility which might press upon her mind. He had an interview with the incensed Lady Rachel and Mr. Beauchamp. In it he revealed, truthfully and regretfully, how the matter stood, and offered to be of any service. The young man met, with such calm dignity and sensible indulgence, the storm of Lady Rachel's rage, and the cold insulting suspicion of her son, that both were finally, against their will, disarmed; and Mr. Beauchamp and Alick were even together entering upon some arrangement as to the measures to be taken in the business, when Lena's illness called her husband away, and turned all his thoughts and interests into another and all-absorbing channel.

That afternoon Lena gave birth to another daughter.

CHAPTER XXI.

"I am free—I am free—I return no more!
The weary time of the cage is o'er;
Through the rolling clouds I can soar on high—
The sky is around me—the blue bright sky!"
MISS HEMANS.

GERALD CAMERON had no intention of repairing, like his companions, to the small white dimity couch prepared for him at the inn.

A note had been slipped into his hand from Jane Pratt, by her fellow helper, William the footman, as he stood at the inn-door, apart from Sackville, some time before Alick's return. Having hastily perused the same, and given a significant nod and an "all's right" in token of his answer, William touched his hat satisfied, and decamped.

It was near the midnight hour when Gerald sallied down stairs, and, summoning the landlord, asked for the immediate use of a horse and gig. The man looked surprised at this demand, but bowed obsequiously, and called the hostler to harness the thorough-bred old hunter to his own light gig for the gentleman.

"How far, sir?" he asked, as Gerald stood strapping up his portmanteau in the courtyard, where he had brought it.

"Oh, not far, if you will have four posters and a chaise ready in half an hour."

The man stared—scraped his foot, and hesitated.

"Mind they're ready—that's all! Come, that will do, my man;" and Gerald, seizing the reins from the hostler, sprang

into his vehicle, and saying hastily, "That may be put in!" pointing to his valise left on the ground, drove off.

Bidding the old porter, as he passed through the lodge gates, not to shut up shop, for he was coming back in a few moments, Gerald drove more slowly half-way down the Park: there he stopped.

Meanwhile, in the interior of the mansion, between the hours of ten and twelve that night, Agnes, with a pale frightened face, might have been seen to start from her bed; to which—after having lain for some time on the floor, in a state of despondency and despair—she had dragged her limbs, stiffened with cold and the fall, and on which she had thrown herself, still dressed. From this state of wretchedness she had been aroused by the sight of Jane Pratt's friendly face; who, with a candle in her hand, and finger to her lip, approached the bed, and began a whispered discourse, which was the cause of Agnes rising, and fixing her bewildered eyes on Jane, who was hastily forming a small bundle of clothes; and then she suffered her bonnet to be put on her head, and a cloak thrown over her slight figure.

Finally—cautiously, gently, like mice, they crept through the passages—down the staircase—Jane's flickering candle alone lighting them through the dense darkness. Every creak of the floor was agony—terror indescribable—in the profound silence which it broke.

But they were safe down stairs—through the vault-like passages; the whole route by which Alick Cameron had been led the night before. Soon Agnes stood without, breathing the cold air with as much enjoyment as if it had been the balmy breezes of Araby, instead of the freezing atmosphere of a January midnight—for it was the breath of liberty!

Then, quickly proceeding from the house through the courtyard gate, a gig they saw approaching to meet them. In another moment the lovers were seated side by side, and Jane Pratt was left standing far behind.

Gerald, ere setting off, had stooped down, and pressed a bank note into her hand, but she had pushed it back, with a murmur of—

"Take care of Miss Agnes!"

Off whirled the gig over the crisp hard ground, disappearing and reappearing at intervals for a little time, between the dark trees; and then it was quite out of sight. Jane put her hand to her eyes, and turned back.

Straight into the stable-yard of the inn Gerald drove. A chaise was there, but no posters harnessed. The landlord and hostler were, however, in attendance.

"Hollo! not ready!" Gerald exclaimed,

in smothered accents of impatience. "How is this?"

The landlord approached the gig cautiously and suspiciously, and held the light up towards the female occupant.

"Because, sir, I was afeard as how all was not right," the man said, respectfully, but firmly, shaking his head. "I'm not going to burn my fingers in the business, one way or the other. I lent you my gig in ignorance, so you must e'en keep it, I suppose, and use it, if it is your pleasure so to do; but as for harnessing for you my posters to run off with one of the young ladies from the Towers—I can't do it—it would be my ruin. Why, sir, a young soldier gentleman like you, if I guess aright, might never be wanting such a thing again as four horses, till the day of your burial—wedding day—and funeral day!—but Lady Rachel and the squire—why, they never stir a mile without them—so—"

"Well, that's enough, wise old Solomon; keep your posters to yourself, and welcome. Hostler, up with my portman-teau!" The hostler, grinning, obeyed.

"This hunter of yours is a capital fellow," Gerald continued; "send for him tomorrow, to —, if you like. And now go off to bed, and hold your tongue, or I'll come back and shoot you and your horse together, on the spot."

Out of the yard he turned, and in another moment had put the horse to a swifter pace than the posters could have accomplished, along the high road; informing his companion, at the same time, lest she should feel any anxiety as to their plans, that they would be at —, the next post town, in little more than an hour, and quite soon enough to manage the remaining eight miles from the railroad station, to catch the night train.

Gretna and its mysteries have become too common, too every-day a tale, for romance. We shall therefore only add, that the *blacksmith par excellence* had *forged* the hymeneal chain round the young couple one good day at least before the clerical brother of the bride could attend to the imperative and astounding mandate of his lady mother, to fly in pursuit, and bring his sister back—if *unmarried*. If *married* to let her alone—in that case, Lady Rachel renounced her and her concerns *for ever*; and though hopeless of effecting the former directions—for the purpose of finding, and taking the offending couple under his authority, for the proper celebration of their marriage, he set off without delay.

Mr. Ralph Beauchamp traced them to Liverpool—there to find, that the preceding morning they had embarked for Ireland.

CHAPTER XXII.

"Speak gently to the erring—know
They must have toiled in vain;
Perchance unkindness made them so—
Oh! win them back again."

ANON.

A VERY sensible change had taken place in the spirits and deportment of Gerald's bride as they drew near Athlone. The wild exhilaration—which had continued unabated during the expedition, drooped as suddenly as it had risen, and called for all his soothing influence to subdue her fear and trembling. The fact was, that the parental relationship having been rendered one of such a bugbear nature to poor Agnes, it was difficult to dispel the idea which began to fill her excited imagination, as to what they were to expect on arriving at her husband's home.

It was Alick who first met them—Alick, who had only preceded them one day, with the strange and startling intelligence; from the surprise and consternation of which, as may be supposed, the General and his wife had scarcely recovered, when thus called upon suddenly and unexpectedly to receive the young adventurers. Little prepared for such a juncture, and aware that becoming manifestations of condemnation and displeasure must strongly mark their first reception, the brothers and sisters were forbidden to fly as usual to greet and welcome the new-comers; and the parents themselves awaited, with as much grave dignity as they could command, the entrance of the culprits, whom Alick had been despatched to conduct to their presence.

They entered—Agnes's slight drooping form supported by Gerald's strong arm.

There was an instant's awful silence. No eager joyful demonstrations of welcome met their ear. Gerald looked round from one to the other, hurt, chafed, and angry at a reception which the ever indulged son and brother was little prepared to expect or endure; whilst Agnes shrunk back, as if she could have sunk into the earth.

But the scene soon changed. Gerald was not the only one who found such conduct hard and unnatural. That instant's silence was followed by hesitating, entreating glances between parents and children—half frowns, glistening, tearful frowns—and then one rose, and then another, till, with one general rush, accompanied by a shout from little Cecil, Gerald was encircled by an eager band, and the first arms in which he found himself pressed were his mother's!

"Come, come, this is too bad!" chimed in at length the General's kind, pleasant voice, in which a slight attempt at the commanding officer was perceptible. "If

you will be so injudicious in your treatment of ill-conduct, at least be just, and not quite leave out of your consideration the fellow-culprit." And he led forward, with grave but gentle kindness, the shrinking girl, who, while the striking scene had been enacting before her eyes, had stood, scarcely knowing whether to laugh or to cry, separated from Gerald by the numerous group.

She now suffered herself to be brought forward—at the same time looking up into the General's face with such a piteous, beseeching expression, that his kind heart melted. He clasped her in his arms, soothed her with kind encouraging words, as he would have done one of his own daughters, then led the trembling girl to Mrs. Cameron, who embraced her with a feeling of interest at least, if not with the same pitying indulgence felt by her husband.

There is always, more or less, some slight feeling of suspicious jealousy inherent in a mother's heart towards the wife of a much-prized son. And in this case, and under such peculiar circumstances, the uncertainty as to the extent of good or evil Gerald had drawn upon himself and family by the affair in which she had entangled them all, rendered it but natural that the character of Mrs. Cameron's sentiments towards her daughter-in-law should be somewhat dubious.

But the embrace and smile seemed kindness and warmth themselves to Agnes. Her friend Annie also approached to greet her—the rest of the party pressing forward with curiosity and interest to look at Gerald's runaway bride. Gerald, grateful, and gratified by his parents' bearing towards her, exclaimed—

"You see, Agnes, you need not have been so terrified at the idea of your reception."

This speech recalled the General and Mrs. Cameron to the serious manner in which both principle and natural inclination taught them to regard the circumstances of the case before them. Recovering from the impulse of kind indulgence which had surprised them into momentary forgetfulness of their duty, their countenances assumed a colder and graver expression; and desiring the rest of the party to leave the room, the father and mother were left alone with the imprudent pair.

The General, then, with mild severity, which penetrated deeply into Agnes's heart, demanded every particular of the extraordinary and much to be lamented step they had so rashly taken.

"Sit down, Agnes!" Mrs. Cameron said, observing the nervous, trembling condition into which the girl had again fallen. "You need not be so very much

frightened, nor cling so closely to Gerald," she continued, with a smile she could not suppress; "you are quite safe, and it is too late, I fear, for it to be of much use to scold you very severely."

Gerald placed his bride upon a seat, and began a clear, frank statement of the nature and circumstances of the engagement, thus concluded by the elopement.

It was not a long story, and he told it in very few words, without comment or argument; but the whole statement was summed up with the declaration that he had pitied Agnes, and then loved her—had pledged his honour to obtain her deliverance, and had therefore made it a point of duty, on arriving in England, immediately to redeem that pledge.

Having in a due manner expressed their condemnation, and endeavoured to impress upon the minds of the young couple, as much conviction of the error of their ways, the conference ended, as it alone could do, by the parents promising to lend their aid—now that the deed was done, and could not be recalled—in doing all in their power in the requisite negotiating with the offended relations.

Upon one point, however, the General and his lady were firm—that Gerald should immediately depart, leaving Agnes with them, until every arrangement was made for their legal marriage, at which event Mrs. Cameron and Alick were present, shortly after. It took place in perfect privacy, in the church at Athlone; and after the ceremony the couple were dismissed for a time into solitary seclusion—"in disgrace!"

In the mean time, Mrs. Cameron set herself, with kind diligence, to the unwanted task of superintending the concoction of a respectable wardrobe for her daughter-in-law; who, having arrived nearly destitute of such a convenience, had been forced to borrow from the family till the arrangements now in progress could be completed—and as Mrs. Gerald Cameron was not accustomed to anything very *recherché* in the way of *toilette*, she was far from particular on the subject.

Poor Mrs. Cameron! this new daughter—this fresh accession of care and anxiety which Gerald had drawn upon her—would have weighed less upon her lively and far-seeing mind—the prospect of future advantage secured to her penniless son, by a union with a girl possessing a fortune of thirty thousand pounds, would have counteracted any present inconvenience to which the step might expose the young people; any trouble and annoyance the mother would willingly have endured, had her mind been in a happier, more comfortable state.

But truly it was racked by anxieties. Her poor child Lena! this was the subject

which weighed most heavily on her spirits. Alick had brought the news of her premature confinement, and General and Mrs. Cameron awaited the answer to the intelligence they had despatched to Mr. Beauchamp respecting his sister, with more eager impatience for the tidings it would impart concerning their beloved daughter, than for the answer concerning the direct purport of the letter.

The epistle arrived without delay. On the score of Lena, the communication was coldly and slightly made. She was doing well; but this information only formed the postscript to the announcement forming the principal subject to the letter. His sister, wrote Mr. Beauchamp, had by her conduct incurred the severe and unmitigated displeasure of Lady Rachel and himself—her guardians, both by nature and legal right. She had forfeited all further countenance or assistance from them. Till by law, therefore, she was entitled to claim her fortune, it was their fixed intention to use their privilege of guardians, and to prevent her touching any portion of it. It was also Lady Rachel's desire that he should communicate her determination never again to behold her offending daughter—his own to decline any further importunity on the part of his sister or her friends. Every overture on her part and theirs would be equally useless, and unnoticed by him.

We cannot say that this sentence affected with much grief or compunction the object of it, when conveyed to her. On the contrary—shocking to relate—the idea of the complete alienation from her mother which it implied, raised her spirits to such an extraordinary pitch, that the Camerons were astounded and horrified.

There was nothing then to be done for the young couple, but to establish them under the parental roof until the time arrived when Gerald's leave of absence should have expired; they must then set off and join his regiment, and do the best they could upon his pay, and the allowance which it was far from convenient to his father to bestow on him; and putting an entire stop to the trip to London which the General had promised to Annie that Spring; for alas! the Duke's health—some said it was his pocket—rendered inevitable the relinquishment of another London season for the continent.

Annie had been invited to accompany them, but her father had objected again to part with her; and in compensation for the amusement and advantage it might have afforded her, proposed taking his family to London for a month or two.

But now the fair Annie, who, in Italy the previous year, had turned so many hot heads, and set on fire so many cold hearts, must be content to vegetate in wild Ire-

land, "wasting her fragrance" in its turf-scented air. For alas! few Lord Alfreds, or anything approaching to him, in Mrs. Cameron's estimation; again turned up amidst the society of Athlone.

However, Mrs. Cameron behaved with much philosophy, and turned her endeavours, with laudable kindness, to the training into something more promising for her son Gerald's future welfare and happiness, her most inconvenient daughter-in-law.

But it was a very difficult undertaking. Agnes was perfectly ignorant of all idea of arrangements as to domestic concerns, in the most limited sense; but being quick-witted and eager to learn everything new, and forget everything old, there was hope of remedy for that evil. It was in the more requisite property of *self-management* that she was still more deficient, and also in a most lamentable degree.

Gerald spoilt her sadly; and the extreme indulgence and kindness of his parents—indeed the sudden transition of atmosphere—was too much for her weak mind to bear; as soon as she began to feel at home, to recover from her first shyness, and to be able to appreciate the advantages of her new state of existence, all ballast was found wanting in the materials she possessed, to endure the transformation, or to render it at all beneficial to herself or others.

She presumed upon her young husband's affectionate—prejudicial indulgence, and bid fair to tease him to death. And then, if his parents, perceiving the mistake of imagining that the same treatment would answer for the wild colt, broken loose, as for their own gently nurtured offspring, endeavoured, for Gerald's sake, to practise towards her a kind, gentle, but more firm, judicious mode of training—then she would start aloof from their endeavours, with suspicious resentment and cowardly fear—as the wild colt might wince from the hidden halter.

Still, there were natural germs of good in her disposition—interesting points in her character, which gave her kind friends more courage and patience in their work of reformation and improvement.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"A conqueror in Kindness; far beyond
The armed victor.—
A gentle word begets a gentle thought;
Drawing the sting from malice. Better thus,
Than brulce with hate the ignorant serpent's head,
Who knoweth nothing till you teach it him."

BARRY CORNWALL.

For several months succeeding the violent commotion—which, like a storm, had shaken the sturdy old Towers to its

base—the household appeared to have settled into a fit of sulkiness as deep and powerful; dense indeed was the gloom and stillness, the impenetrable dullness which seemed to reign over its interior.

There was nothing partaking of peace, but that sweet spirit which dwelt within the bosom of the young wife and mother, breathing her sad and joyless life, with the same usual patient submission.

Mr. Beauchamp had taken Lena and her babies for some weeks to the seaside, after her recovery—the only break made by any of the inmates of the Towers.

Lady Rachel's fury and wrath after the elopement, had not in any degree exhausted itself, till she was laid low by a bilious fever; she had expelled Jane Pratt, on strong suspicion of connivance, from the house, and placed the Miss Beauchamps under severer restrictions and additional the *surveillance* of a former governess, summoned for the purpose; all communication with the offices being also cut off by lock and key.

Miss Ricketts only escaped being immediately expelled in the first paroxysm of Lady Rachel's rage, by a severe attack of illness, with which the poor woman was seized, immediately after the shock of her pupil's delinquency.

Amelia, too, became poorly; so that Mr. Hobson had plenty of occupation at the Towers; for, being a remarkably clever man in his profession, even Lady Rachel deigned to accept the services of the "jackanapes apothecary," and was too much absorbed by her own ailments to remember to forbid his extending them further.

So matters had continued. Lady Rachel, like a wounded lion, subdued in strength, but only the more sullenly savage on her convalescence, tyrannized with even greater jealous vigilance over all within her influence; and it was not decreased by witnessing the ominous composure and apparent unconcern with which her daughters submitted to her inflictions.

The explosion broke out at last. It was about six months after Agnes's elopement, that Miss Beauchamp entered the private sitting-room of her brother, who was breakfasting with his wife. Rachel was in her walking-dress, and looked very pale, with evident marks of emotion on her countenance.

Mr. Beauchamp looked upon her with a cold inquiring gaze; Lena with nervous solicitude.

"I am come, Lionel," said Rachel, in a somewhat hurried, but firm voice, "to announce to you an event which will both astonish and displease you, and also to request you to make the communication to Lady Rachel, who is as yet in ignorance of what has happened this morning, and of what is further to take place."

"Explain yourself, Miss Beauchamp, more particularly, if you please," answered Mr. Beauchamp; "I think I am now beyond being either surprised or displeased at anything you can have to reveal to me—although to *conceal* has hitherto certainly been more your forte. Your change of tact may indeed excite some little astonishment in my breast; but you doubtless have your own wise and judicious motives for it."

"My motives are very simple, indeed, brother; necessity and the uselessness—indeed, impossibility—of any concealment in the case. If I have been hitherto to blame for the deceptive course, which has been the consequence of the harshness and unkindness—nay, the tyranny of those who have ruled over us from our infancy—God knows, in this case, I have been sufficiently punished by the pain which its issue has inflicted upon me. Yes, I own," and Rachel threw back her stately head, with a curl as of something like disgust upon her lip—the proud blood mantling her cheek; "I own it is with no great feeling of satisfaction or pleasure, that I announce to you, Lionel, our sister Amelia's marriage, this morning, with Mr. Hobson, the apothecary."

Mr. Beauchamp sat, for a while, upright upon his chair—aghast—motionless! Lena covered her eyes with her hands, with a faint exclamation of horror and amazement.

The next moment the brother had recovered from his stupefaction—pale with rage he started up, and grasping the arm of Rachel, dared her to repeat the cursed words, that a sister of *his* had disgraced herself—her family, by stooping to wed a low-born village apothecary. And when Rachel declared her inability to deny the assertion, the livid countenance and the imprecations—which, through his teeth, were levelled on the offender and the coadjutor in her crime, who he considered was before him in the person of Rachel—were startling and appalling to witness, from a man so self-possessed; and well might even Rachel quail beneath his convulsed grasp.

Mr. Beauchamp had manifested no such violent symptoms of emotion at Agnes's delinquency. No! because that act had merely skimmed over, scarcely grazed the touchstone of his heart—*self*. Agnes's misdemeanour was, after all, of a nature to do injury to no one but herself; and therefore it was in the nature of the man, after having done all in his power to make the matter sure, by visiting the offence as severely as possible upon her, to suffer himself to be no further affected by it. But this was quite a different case. His sister Amelia's act of low folly had brought degradation upon *himself*—his family—his name, he thought; and the

proud, selfish man was stung into fury by the galling wounds inflicted upon his *self-love*.

A soft pressure upon his arm—a gentle, timid voice—recalled him a little to recollection.

"Lionel, dear Lionel, be calm, I beseech you," Lena pleaded, as she stood, pale and trembling, by his side. "Speak gently to Rachel—hear her explanation. It may not be her fault—Amelia's conduct pains her also."

"No, dear, sweet Lena!" Rachel interrupted; "do not trouble yourself on my account—gentleness and kindness would come too late to be of any service now; they might once have done much, perhaps—or rather, have prevented much of evil—and thus spared many from the mortification which now so strongly affects my brother; nor do I care to exculpate myself from my share of blame in Amelia's conduct—I am also going to leave this house immediately. Nay, Lionel, for two long years I have been my own mistress—it had always been my intention so to act, shortly after this day, on which poor Amelia has attained her twenty-first year—I did not think I should have to leave it thus alone."

"And may I ask into whose arms Miss Beauchamp, after kindly disposing of her sisters, intends flying—by what reputable connexion *she* contemplates—she intends honouring her family? The village attorney—or perhaps the village school-master?" her brother inquired with the bitterness of sneers.

"I am going to my brother Ralph," Miss Beauchamp replied, with haughty dignity. "If you have any further desire to be assured of the respectability of my position, you shall hear from the Rectory to that effect, in a day or two. The arrangements for my journey into Sussex are made—Jane Pratt accompanies me. My small effects are now in preparation. I have written to my mother to explain all—the letter will be given to her after my departure. I would not have our last interview, of the violent nature it must certainly have proved."

"And now, my dear Lena," Rachel continued, after a pause, in which she awaited what further her brother might have to say; but either stupefied or sullen, he remained pale and silent—"Sweetest Lena, let me kiss you, and bid you farewell!" and she embraced her sister-in-law with tender emotion. "I need not tell you how I shall ever think of you with deep, heartfelt gratitude. Yes, *grateful* I am, Lena. Do not say I have no cause for gratitude towards you, for believe me when I declare, that it is you who have been the means of keeping up any feeling approaching to good or gentle in my nature, by the angelic influence of your meek

example—that counteracting influence of patient endurance which I had never before witnessed in our home. And your dear little children—Lena, I must kiss them also before I go. Oh, Lena, I need not, I am sure, urge *you* to endeavour to guard them from the cruel injustice of a harsh education—an unloved, cheerless childhood. And Lionel," she continued, turning with softened feelings towards her brother, "he will take warning, if it be but for his own sake, from the example of his *mother's children*, and train his daughters after the model of his sweet wife."

The brother turned haughtily away from Rachel's proffered hand. Once more she embraced the weeping Lena, and murmured, "God bless you, sweet angel!" with tears starting in her eyes, and emotion struggling in her warm, affectionate heart.

It was with more painful feelings than one, that the spirit of Rachel was oppressed, when she set forth that day from her natural—or rather, as it had been rendered, *most unnatural* home. She had received the galling lesson, the usual result to those who, like her, have forsaken the straight path of truth and honesty, and, against the instinctive dictates of a natural sense of right and wrong, entered upon a course of deception.

Rachel had aided and abetted in deceiving others, and she had been paid in her own coin; herself deceived and forsaken by her companion and own familiar friend. For indeed, Amelia's affair with Mr. Hobson had been entered upon unknown and unsanctioned by the sister, upon whose strong mind and judgment she had ever professed to lean with confidence and affection—nay, till the very last moment had Amelia carried it on, leaving Rachel in ignorance of the engagement having been contracted, and suffering her to form plans and purposes for the future, without enlightening her in any way.

The fact was, that Rachel had discouraged and condemned, from a very early stage of the business, the approach towards an intimacy greater than she approved, between the young apothecary and her sister, and had spoken her mind freely on the subject to Amelia; and on that young lady having confessed that she did not see what objection there could be to Mr. Hobson, and that she thought him the handsomest, as well as the most agreeable man she had ever seen, Rachel treated the idea with such high-bred scorn and aversion, that Amelia's lips had been sealed upon the subject ever after, and Rachel felt satisfied that she had shamed her out of the unworthy thoughts which her insinuations had implied.

During the interval of time from this conversation to the present moment, much deep cunning and subtlety must have been

practised by Amelia and her lover—for like the effect of a thunderbolt, falling from a serene sky, was the announcement, made to Rachel with much *sang froid* and composure the night before, that arrangements were made for Amelia's marriage the following morning with young Hobson; her sister also requesting her to complete her good and sisterly offices, by lending the support of her countenance at the altar.

To turn Amelia from her purpose, Rachel then saw to be impossible; to betray her would be, she considered, as treacherous as useless; for Amelia, her own mistress, could not be deterred by right of authority, from following her own inclinations in the matter. All Rachel's representations to her sister, as to the unsuitability of the match—the degradation from her own rank in life—fell like idle words on the ear of Amelia.

Her mother, she said, had debarred her from all possibility of making a more suitable connexion; and if she had found some one to marry her in a lower station, it was that mother's own fault. She was sure, however, that she should find it a match quite to her taste. She was sick and weary of the cold grandeur around her, and would be only too happy to find herself peeping over "the green blinds, through the geranium-pots, in Mr. Hobson's new bow-windowed house, at her mother, or any of the party driving past in their carriage and four."

Miss Beauchamp could scarcely blame her sister for sentiments and conduct, of which her mother's system had too truly been the foundation, in a mind naturally of no very delicate nature; and it finally ended by her yielding to the faithful sisterly pleadings of her heart, and leaving the house at an early hour that morning, and repairing with her to the church; where, with all the wounded pride of the Beauchamps swelling in her breast and burning in her cheek, Rachel had stood by the altar with a *Miss Hobson* on the other side, and had seen her sister with all the noble blood of the Beauchamps and Tremornes flowing in her veins, give her hand to the well-pleased village Galen; for, whatever loss of practice might be the result of his offensive alliance with a daughter of the Towers, the fortune of his nobly connected bride would compensate for it *thirty thousand fold*.

Rachel had not been the only ally against whose approval Amelia had acted. Jane Pratt, who, on being turned from the Towers, had established herself with some friends in the neighbourhood, to await the expected summons to accompany Miss Beauchamp into Sussex, had also refused to lend any assistance in the present step, when it was hinted by Amelia.

"Miss Agnes's affair had been quite a

different case," she argued; "to help her to wed one of a stock from which her proud brother himself had deigned to choose a wife—and so noble and handsome a gentleman as Mr. Gerald Cameron—was doing no wrong to herself or the family itself; but to aid and abet one of her young ladies marrying beneath her—it was against her sense either of duty or inclination."

Jane Pratt had gone to the church to see and arrange with Miss Beauchamp concerning their journey, which the former determined should not be delayed—a day's longer residence at the Towers being now rendered intolerable—and so Rachel Beauchamp departed.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"Dearest sister, I

Am one of whom thou doubtless hast much heard,
Not always well. My name too oft pronounced
With sighs, desponding sorrow, and reproach.

Yet deem not hardly of me; who best know,
Most gently censure me."

COLERIDGE.

LADY RACHEL left the Towers for London, shortly after this last catastrophe, not for the purpose of drowning her griefs in the gaieties of the season, but to seek the only hope now left for compensating the wrongs she had received. She had formed an idea, from some wording of the late Mr. Beauchamp's will, that there was a possibility of tying up the fortunes of the married daughters, so as to prevent them or their husbands, fully benefiting from the possession of them without the sanction of their guardians.

Mr. Beauchamp participated in this idea, and accompanied his mother to London, in order to consult with the lawyers upon the subject. Thus was Lena, for a few days, left to the unusual enjoyment of something like freedom, if enjoyment it could be called; for alas! freedom under circumstances like hers, only sets the heart at liberty, to range at wide throughout a world of sad thoughts, and to plunge into thick shades of gloom and darkness. Lena's sensitive heart had been much affected by the late events. The dropping off one by one of her sisters-in-law, by such strange and striking events, had made a deep impression on her feelings.

Not only did she feel—though she had profited little by their proximity—the void and blank which their desertion had occasioned—that there were still fewer warm hearts around her, (for Rachel's had proved to her a very warm one,) but it was to her a wretched, unnatural idea, that her husband must now be divided in

body and spirit from each member of his family—brothers and sisters—one now belonging to her own family—each at variance with him!

Could she, with these feelings at her heart, joy much in her short-lived liberty to look, speak and move, at her pleasure?

Her husband must, indeed—considering the jealousy of his disposition—have acquired great confidence in his young wife, thus to have persuaded himself to leave her at all, after the startling instances, by which his home had been shaken.

But Lena could not suppress a faint, sad smile, as she listened to the minute directions he gave her concerning her movements during his absence, and the injunctions she found to have been imposed upon poor old Ricketts to be her constant companion.

"Does he fear that I shall run away?" she thought; and remembering Alick's words, a tear dimmed her eye, and she inwardly murmured, with a sigh, "Ah, he need not fear—all those are far away, who care to see me."

It must have been a strange change to Miss Ricketts, from her old post, to the office of guardian over the gentle, lovely being, who treated her with such gentle, amiable consideration.

For Lena, though she could not bring herself to experience any very tender or agreeable feelings towards the repellent and harsh instructress, who had rendered miserable the youthful days of her sisters-in-law—still, in spite of this feeling, was unable to help pitying the unloved, friendless being, who, after all, might have been more the slave of Lady Rachel's will than her own natural inclinations; and who now, with health broken, and occupation gone, could not even look or hope for that reward and consolation which those in her situation so often receive, if only in the remembrance of the kindly feelings which subsisted between the governess and pupil.

Such reward she must not expect—rather curses, not loud, but deep; contempt and dislike, from those on whom she had spent her strength—had sacrificed so many years of her existence. Lena, to further her husband's wishes, and facilitate the poor creature's execution of them, invited her—though little conversation took place between them—to sit where she sat, and walk where she walked; for Miss Ricketts was well enough now to crawl about the grounds a little, and Lena felt no inclination to overpass their bounds.

There she would fall in with the nurses and children, and even presume—now she had no companion to keep her arm in his, and deem it an offence if she ventured to withdraw it—to carry her

baby a short distance, or order the little struggling Rachel to be released, and suffer the child to toddle by her side, holding on by her dress.

"I wonder she is so fond of me," Mrs. Beauchamp said one day, in speaking of the little girl, to the baby's nurse, a respectful, kind-looking young woman, who, in contrast to the established head-lady of the nursery, seemed to take a pleasure in forwarding what she considered the young mother's due enjoyment of her own children; "I am sure I have seen but little of the darling. I wonder she even knows that I am her mother;" and tears were in her eyes.

"I am sure, madam, you seem very fond of your children," the woman said, in a tone which caused Lena to exclaim, with some quickness, as she turned with heightened colour towards the woman—

"Fond! had you any doubt of that, Mrs. Brown?"

"Oh, no, madam! I beg your pardon—but not nursing your babies, and seeing so little of them! I am sure it's no fault of yours, madam—but most fine ladies get the name of not caring for their children when they are so young, like."

"You are quite right; it is not surprising that such should be the idea," answered the poor young mother, with a smothered sigh; "and indeed it is a bitter pang, to feel that all pleasure and interest in my children should be so circumscribed. 'Oh! Brown, I envy you,' she said, with a sad smile, 'and would willingly change places with you. What pleasure you must anticipate in so soon returning home to a child—to have it all your own—to keep it always with you!'"

"Yes, madam, the little dear! and I hope never to leave it again; for please God to give me another baby, I shall stay at home and suckle it; that's the way to enjoy one's children, and make up for the pain and trouble of bringing them into the world."

Poor Lena turned away her head, and fairly wept.

Her period of independence was not suffered to pass without an adventure of some little interest and note—but unfortunate, inasmuch as it proved objectionable to the jealous, prejudiced disposition of her husband.

On one of these rambles in the park with her children, on a fine cool summer afternoon, a balmy breeze stirring the branches of the trees—the sky's clear blue unruddled by a cloud—an equestrian, riding slowly along, looking with deep interest around him, came suddenly upon the party.

Lena stepped on the grass amidst the nurses, to let him pass. The stranger was a young man, of about five or six and

twenty in appearance, with dark, crisp, curly hair, and that free open look and unstudied carriage which so generally mark a naval man.

His dark eye might have been seen to travel observingly, but composedly at first, over the group; but as it fell on the tall, lady-like figure amongst it, an expression of more earnest interest and attention changed the expression of his countenance; and he gazed so earnestly, as to cause Lena to draw up her slight form with graceful dignity.

The horseman had passed on, but again turning, reined in his steed, and sprang to the ground close to Lena.

"May I take the liberty," he asked in a frank, manly voice, which sounded not quite strange to Lena's ear, "to ask whether it is to Mrs. Beauchamp I speak?"

Lena bowed gracefully, but gravely, as she stepped onwards.

"I was told all the family were away," the stranger continued, "or I should not have dared perhaps to intrude as I have done; but I cannot feel sorry for the mistake, since it has forced on me a pleasure I have often longed for. Ah, you do not know me—perhaps if you did, you would frown upon me—for no doubt you have heard nothing but evil of Lionel's scape-grace brother, Alfred, who ran away and went to sea."

Lena started and coloured, but with a sweet, kind smile extended her hand, which he seized and shook with sailor-like warmth.

Lena now recognised the voice to be like that of Rachel, whom, indeed, Alfred much resembled.

She looked upon her new-found brother-in-law with sad, affectionate interest, as she murmured some words of welcome.

"And these are Lionel's children!" he said. "May their wicked uncle kiss them, Mrs. Beauchamp?" and he lifted the little Rachel in his arms.

"It seems very strange all this," he continued, restoring the child to her nurse; and walking onwards, by Lena's side; "so changed—to come here to find all the old ones gone, and only new faces to meet and to greet me."

"You were quite young when you left the Towers," Lena remarked, in a low, embarrassed tone.

"Yes," Alfred answered, abruptly, "I have spent many a merry and many a stormy day in this old place. I have weathered many a storm at sea, since; but they are nothing to home storms: one strong gale here sent me flying at last. But I will not talk to you about it—I cannot expect Lionel's wife to think me anything but a brute," he exclaimed with some passionate feeling. "Forgive me," he added, seeing Lena's look of distress,

"but my mother and brother refuse to see me, or hear of me—therefore, what must you think?"

"Think, Alfred!" Lena said, in a voice of tremulous emotion; "I assure you it breaks my heart to think of all these divisions and strifes between relations—until I married, I scarcely imagined such things could be."

"I dare say not," Alfred said, looking at the fair young creature with admiring interest; "you must indeed be like a lamb amongst wolves. Ralph made me very anxious to see you, by his description. I first saw Lionel's marriage in the papers, and often puzzled my brain, as I swung in my hammock, to fancy what sort of a wife he could have chosen, and also what sort of a husband he would make—and I almost hoped she was of a very different sort from you."

"Why?" Lena asked, opening wide her beautiful eyes, at this ungallant assertion.

"Perhaps, because I am of no forgiving disposition, and could not, therefore, wish him to possess an angel—also, because I felt a strange sensation of interest in my sister-in-law, and wished her not to be one for whom I could desire a happier fate than to be the slave of Lionel's selfish—"

"Mr. Alfred Beauchamp!" interrupted Lena, "no more of this—your brother is my husband;" and she coloured painfully.

The young man was all penitence in a moment.

"Ah! forgive me, sweet sister," he said; "I am a blunt, unthinking man, and they have treated me so heartlessly!—I wonder I have a heart left for anybody. The numbers of letters I have written to my mother and brother, during the last many years, just to admit me to see some of them—and not a word in answer; my letters unread, I believe. On arriving in England, I heard they were all out of the way, and came to have a word with some of the old servants, and my sisters—and now I hear they are gone too. Well, at least, now I shall be able to renew my intercourse with them. I can scarcely blame Amelia, though she has made such a hash of it—and poor little Agnes!"

"Oh, naughty Agnes!" said Lena, shaking her head, with a sad smile.

"Ran away with your brother—well, what was the harm? She has chosen well, if you are a specimen of the stock. And Rachel—dear girl, is with Ralph. Ah! I still may go and sing 'oh be joyful!' with her—over her perfect liberty. But here we are!"

They had approached the mansion, on which the young man's eyes were tearfully fixed.

"And here I am," he continued, "talk-

ing to you as if you had been my sister always, instead of the unknown sister of two years' standing—when, perhaps too, I may never be allowed to speak to you again."

"Will you not come in?" Lena murmured, timidly.

"How I should like to do so! had I found the house empty, I must have walked over it like a visiter; but as I must now enter it in my own character, and in that character have been forbidden its walls, I suppose I must give it up—unless, indeed," Alfred said, wistfully, "unless you will take upon yourself, your lawful authority, and give me an invitation. Dare you?" he asked, looking at Lena with a smile.

She was silent—hesitated, and with a perplexed, distressed countenance, stood in painful embarrassment.

Alfred Beauchamp saw at once that *she did not dare*, and pressed her no further.

"Ah! Alfred," Lena said, as they parted shortly after, "I shall try what I can do that you may be once more frankly welcomed to your brother's house," and she did her gentle best.

Mr. Beauchamp, on his return home, heard from her lips the story of his brother's visit—Lena pleading sweetly and earnestly for the alien. Displeasure at the intrusion, as he termed it, of his brother upon her society, was the chief feature of the emotion excited in her husband's mind.

As for her intercession, it fell like water upon a rock.

"I never forgive when once offended," was his answer; "do you not offend me, Lena, by this unnecessary and fruitless supplication."

Soon after, the Beauchamps—mother, son, wife and children, quitted England for the Continent.

CHAPTER XXV.

"They tell me she is happy now,
The gayest of the gay;
They hint that she forgets me,
But heed not what they say;
Like me, perhaps, she struggles with
Each feeling of regret,
But if she loves as I have loved,
She never can forget."

HATNES BAYLEY.

THE following spring, in the columns of the fashionable papers, appeared the name "of the beautiful Miss Cameron," who, under the auspices of Her Grace the Duchess of Stratheden, was forming one of the brightest stars of the London season.

We may imagine with what delight Mrs. Cameron's eyes sparkled when reading this paragraph in Ireland—what dazzling images it conjured up in her mind's eye, and how the General threw the paper

aside with an amused smile, saying "he hoped his little Annie was enjoying herself."

Another eye gazed upon this announcement—that of a young officer, arrived that night in London—and who, with a sigh thought within himself—"Dear Annie, then I may see you once again!" and Frank Mildmay, for he it was, caught his first view of Annie the next day in the Park. He saw that beloved face gleaming from the window of the Duchess's carriage, as she talked to a gentleman riding by its side—sparkling as the sunny wave, as if no bitter tears, such as he had seen her shed, had ever quenched the brightness of those eyes—and the young man turned away, sad and sorrowful. For though time and circumstances had taught him, doubtless, also to smile again, it had not taught him to forget his lost—his only love. And now the sight of her revived all the former feelings of his heart, and the past was to him as yesterday.

Frank Mildmay was inconsiderate and *exigent* enough to feel for the moment a jealous pang, when he looked upon the renovated roses and innocent gaiety which bloomed upon Annie's dimpled cheeks, in lieu of the drooping sadness which cast its shadow upon her when they parted.

He passed the house where she dwelt one evening, and beheld her from his cab, stepping lightly over the druggist, laid down for the Duchess and herself, to pass into the carriage, which was to convey them to some dinner party.

What a vision of grace and loveliness did that glimpse afford him—and how painful was the thought that the sweet smile he had caught upon her countenance was going to shed its beams around in scenes where he was not—or more dreadful still, perchance condense its radiance on some favoured one, whom her heart had singled out from the crowd of adorers.

But no—hope chased the dark shadow from his heart. True she was gay and happy now—he had heard before that so it was with her—but yet she could not have quite blotted him from her recollection. He trusted too firmly in her affection—and Frank Mildmay ardently desired to meet her and speak to her once more.

Yet what could he hope! Nothing, he thought, if he thought at all; all he wished was but for the assurance that she had not forgotten him. For some time opportunity failed to obtain for him the gratification of his desire. But a night at length arrived—It was a public charity ball at Willis's rooms, under the patronage of the Duchess—Annie surely would be there.

Thither, therefore, with some brother officers he went, and found himself in that brilliant saloon, not mingling in the gay throng—but fixed in a position command-

ing a good view of the door—standing with pale and eager countenance—with look intent, upon the watch.

At length a party swept into the room—the Duchess with her quiet composure and unpretending dignity of mien. She was accompanied by a numerous circle; but foremost of the group was Annie Cameron, leaning on her arm, her dark eyes dancing with animation as she glanced over the brilliant scene—her graceful little form bending forward, all ready, as it were, to bound at the sound of Jullien's inspiring strains, and to mingle amongst the dancers.

She had not to wait long—seeming already to have been engaged, for she was shaking her head in refusal to many who pressed forward, and soon she disappeared with a partner amidst the maze of waltzers, from the eyes of Frank Mildmay, whose first impulse on her entrance had been to start forward towards her, the next, to pause and gaze, and watch her—every moment becoming paler and more agitated than before.

The crowd was too great to admit him, though he pressed forward, to gain a view of Annie and her partner. Only now and then his eager gaze caught a glimpse of her form in her simple robe of purest white and wreath of roses in her hair, "with a step as fleet and eye as bright" as if she had never danced that one last sad waltz of despair which preceded their parting.

The music ceased: the stream of dancers flowed into the refreshment room. Mildmay followed. He made his way to the table, and at length found himself close to the spot where Annie stood with her ice in her hand, talking to her late partner. He listened breathlessly to the accents of her silvery voice. They were light and careless words—not such as he had heard from her.

Her partner had turned away for a moment to attend to a Dowager who had demanded his services. With a beating heart the young man seized this opportunity which left Annie unattended, and in a low, earnest voice murmured—

"Annie!"

She turned abruptly, and with a wild, startled gaze.

"Frank!" she cried, in a voice trembling with mingled emotions, in which joy predominated—"Frank!—dear Frank!" and in an instant her hands were clasped in those of her enchanted lover.

We will not expatiate upon the forgetful delight of the moment that followed this reunion—Annie's late partner on turning again towards her, had the mortification of seeing her disappearing amidst the crowd on the arm of the young officer.

She must have mortally offended more

than one that night; for engaged she certainly had been for several dances; yet for one long quadrille she was hidden from all possibility of discovery—and for the next the Duchess, who was now beginning to be uneasy at her long desertion, and on the look-out for her lovely charge, saw her led forth by Frank Mildmay to join the dance; noticing her chaperone's good-natured, smiling remark of "Dear Annie, I thought you were quite lost!" by a smile, but of a brightness chastened and subdued.

Yes—whilst her partner, before so pale and dejected, was lifted to the skies with fulness of bliss—Annie, in her turn, had become pale—her large eyes thoughtful and sad—her spirits seeming as much broken down as his were elevated; and yet from the same ecstatic feeling of happiness in both, sprang these different effects.

"Who was that, dear Annie?" the Duchess inquired, as they rattled away homewards that morning from the ball.

"Who, dear duchess, do you mean?" Annie asked with hesitating voice and timidly blushing cheeks.

"That good-looking young officer who put you into the carriage, and who has been so monopolizing to-night."

"That—that," Annie murmured, turning her truthful eyes full upon her Grace—her face in one bright glow, "that was Frank—I mean Mr. Mildmay; do you not remember him, Duchess?"

"Mildmay—Frank Mildmay—oh, Annie, naughty girl—you do not mean to say it was him?" the Duchess began with playful reproach and alarm. "For my sake, pray take care—do not let me incur your mother's lasting anger and reproach. Remember, I am responsible for every consequence which may befall."

"Ah!" Annie murmured with a pathetic sigh, and quiet tone of resignation, "you need not be afraid. I have told him it must never be again, as it once was between us—as it was to-night when we could not but be so glad to see one another."

This artless declaration of her ingenuous charge seemed to have perfectly reassured the gentle Duchess—little versed or experienced in *les affaires de cœur*. Besides the fact was, that to speak in a worldly sense, she was far from being the most expedient guardian to whom a match-making mother could securely—as far as matrimonial views were concerned—have committed the chaperonage of a daughter.

Her Grace would have been only too delighted to have served and gratified her friend by obtaining a splendid match for Annie, but after all, the noble chaperone was but a kind friend—not a mother with every feeling of interest and affection bent

on her anxious aim—neither was she a chaperone in whose nature existed that busy manœuvring-loving spirit, which often renders her even more efficient than a mother herself.

In short, the Duchess proved the most agreeable and most indulgent of cicerones—one exactly calculated to render a young and unworldly spirit perfectly happy—for there was no pushing forward or pulling back—no chilling lectures on eligibility or ineligibility. She was pleased, as her lovely charge was pleased and admired—but she did not watch with very vigilant minuteness, who pleased the young girl most, or by whom she was most admired.

There were two individuals, at least, most unexceptionable, whom it required very little watching to discover, were taken captive by Annie's charms; and the Duchess felt certain that all must continue *coulour de rose* as it had begun. No fears disturbed her at the re-appearance of Annie's old lover. So good and dutiful a child, she felt confident, would rather die than displease her parents. So again and again in public and in private they dined and sat together unquestioned and unnoticed. Young Mildmay did not dance or talk to Annie half so much after all as many others, and Annie had said—"It could never be between them as it had been," and what Annie said was always so true, so perfectly to be relied upon. Annie had, she knew, mentioned in her letters home the fact of having met her old lover, and the Duchess also mentioned the circumstance, but fearlessly and lightly, amidst details of attention and admiration recorded for the gratification of her friend.

And it was but one week after, that Mrs. Cameron's happy, well-pleased answer arrived; she either from policy or real fearlessness treating the communication almost as lightly.

"So, dear Annie had really seen her poor little lover—however, she had no fears—she relied too firmly on her good sense to conduct her in the matter."

They had met but a very few times then—yet Annie sighed as she read these words. Another week passed, and another—they had met still less. But alas! once, once would have been sufficient for the young hearts that already had loved—a word, a look, almost sufficient to reunite them.

At the end of these few weeks there came a sudden startling turn in the smooth-flowing tide.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"Fruitless as constancy may be,
No chance, no change, may turn from thee,
One who has loved thee wildly, well,
But whose first love-vow breathed—farewell."
L. K. L.

"ANNIE," exclaimed her Grace one morning, her eyes glistening with pleasure and satisfaction, "how charmed your dear mother will be!"

Annie had been seated, silently watching the perusal of a letter she had just before given into the Duchess's hands.

It was a proposal of marriage from one of the best *partis* in London—the aspirant having followed in the train of the lovely Miss Cameron during the few months of her spring campaign—one whom many were set to capture for themselves or others, noble, young and rich.

Fortunate Annie, fortunate chaperone, still more fortunate Mrs. Cameron, how pleased indeed would she have been!

This thought was too much for Annie's heart to bear—the tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Why did he write?" she murmured. "I am sure I never intended to give him any right to think I loved him—and I should have been spared the pain of doing that which I know will so much disappoint poor Mamma."

"Disappoint her! then do you not mean to accept Lord B——, Annie? Well, well, my dear child, do not weep so bitterly—your mother need not hear of this affair, and I doubt not you will have some other opportunity, perhaps more to your taste, before the season is over; we are not obliged to let your Mamma into all our little secrets—you are my child for the present, you know—I do not urge you to accept Lord B——, particularly if there is one amongst your other admirers you think you can like better."

But Annie still wept—the large tears falling faster and faster, and with passionate fervour, as if from some deeper emotion than that which her words seemed to express.

It was most painful to her kind friend to see those bright eyes thus overflowing, and such a change from its wonted radiance to almost agonized despair, on the sweet countenance of her charge.

"Annie, dear Annie, pray do not give way to this useless sorrow—all you have to do is to answer this letter, or I can do it for you, that is the extent of the misfortune."

"Oh no, dearest Duchess," Annie exclaimed, her tears suddenly ceasing, and turning her earnest eyes full upon her friend, "this is *not all*—I have perhaps deserved it, but I did not think I should feel all this misery again—and to give you

annoyance, after all the trouble and kindness you have bestowed upon me—and even more . . . to grieve and disappoint my dear anxious mother!—I know I shall do all this, but I must not deceive you—I must tell you all—that not only I cannot accept this man, but no other person whom you would consider desirable—no, it would be a grievous sin were I to think of marrying—for I can never love but one—and he—”

Her head drooped upon her bosom, and the rest of her speech was inaudible to the ears of the Duchess. But a sudden qualm seized the spirit of her Grace—a spectre in the shape of the young man with the interesting melancholy countenance, following, wherever she moved, the steps of Annie. All the horrors of chaperonage assailed the noble lady, as laying her hand on Annie’s arm, she said in a nervous tone,

“Not Mr. Mildmay, I hope, my dear child.”

“Yes, even so—Frank Mildmay!” Annie repeated, with a sigh of quiet despair, covering her face with her hands.

A pause ensued.

“This is very unfortunate,” the Duchess at last murmured with a troubled, perplexed countenance. “I have been very imprudent.”

“Oh no, dear Duchess, not you—it is I and Frank who have been imprudent—but indeed we must have forgotten how much we loved each other—and we fancied, at least I did, that there was no danger. I did not allow Frank to dance with me more than any of my other partners. We met only as friends—but soon his resolution gave way, and again he spoke to me of love—I would not listen to him at first, but oh! I soon felt my heart too weak, too fond, too much again all his own, and now—and now!”

“Annie, Mr. Mildmay must go; it was very wrong of him to come at all into your presence, being so little confident of command over his feelings—that is all that can be done—and you, my dear, will, I am sure, endeavour to conquer the weakness which this imprudent renewal of intercourse has revived for a brief space. I know you will exert yourself for my sake—for your parents’ sake—you must not distress them by the useless communication of what has passed—you will recover from this passing weakness, and all will be well again.”

Annie shook her head mournfully and hopelessly.

“Oh no, dear Duchess; I feel now as if it never could be right again with me, and that if Frank and I were forced to part, my heart would indeed break.”

“But, my dear Annie,” the Duchess pleaded in an anxious tone of concern,

“if he stay, and you meet again, it must be with your parents’ sanction; I must write to your father or mother.”

“I know you must,” Annie sighed; “it is very terrible to have to vex them so—but,” she added, clasping her hands with sorrowful fervour, “they will be kind and pitiful; they must know that I would not willingly have brought this upon them. I little imagined the love that was subdued, but not extinguished, could return with such overwhelming power—Yes,” she added, “write to them, dear Duchess, and perhaps they will come, and though it may be but to crush my hopes once more—perhaps to reproach me—still that would even be better than to be parted from them in my misery.”

“Hopes, dear Annie! have you any hopes?” asked the Duchess.

“I scarcely know,” Annie sighed. “Sometimes Frank and I are so bold as to talk of hope together; for why—why should two hearts so fondly attached, be forced to part? We are older now—two years have passed—our love has been tried by absence—and yet we still feel the same towards each other. It is no idle fancy, *our* love. Its strength is sufficient to make up for the lack of all other advantages—want of fortune—of worldly riches—although Frank has enough, we think, nay more, than to satisfy our wishes. Yes; and with so much love for our mutual support, what can harm us? It is my happiness alone my parents seek—I know it is—then can they wish to make me truly wretched?”

The gentle Duchess was electrified by this outburst of poor Annie’s feeling, and the strength and purity of the “love to agony distress” it seemed to manifest; for it was not what she was accustomed to come in contact with.

And was Frank Mildmay to blame if such love, which even on the first evening of their reunion, in the full confidence of the utter unreserve of young and innocent affection, had flowed unwittingly from Annie’s eyes and mantled on her glowing cheeks, when she turned to speak to him who had never lost his place in her heart—could the coldest nature blame him that he acted thus, in spite of all that had doomed their union an impossibility?

In the interval that elapsed between the despatch of the Duchess’s vexatious letter—vexatious both to her own feelings, and to those whom it addressed—and the expected answer—her Grace thought it proper to put an entire veto upon any intercourse between the lovers.

She wrote therefore by Annie’s desire to Frank Mildmay, informing him of the step she had taken, telling him that the Duke and herself deemed it advisable that he should avoid the society of Miss Came-

ron till the presence or sanction of her parents was obtained.

For the next week therefore, many were the conjectures afloat as to what had so dimmed the bright smiles of the ball-room favourite Annie Cameron, and changed the animated glances of her eye.

The morning arrived when with every reasonable allowance a letter from Ireland, in answer to the Duchess's despatch, might be expected. But the post brought it not; in the evening however a surer answer came, in the shape of the General himself. He pressed Annie fervently and silently in his arms as she flew into his embrace; and leant back her head to gaze timidly upon his countenance, that she might there seek to read her fate.

But the General looked pale and grave, and Annie hid her face once more upon his bosom, her heart dying within her.

Nothing however further passed on the subject then, for the Duchess was present and began asking irrelevant questions to avert the immediate entrance upon that, which from the General's countenance she equally dreaded for her dear little charge.

Annie heard her father say in answer to the Duchess's inquiries about her friend Laura, as the poor girl stood pale and trembling by his side, her hand pressed in his—that her mother would much have liked to accompany him, but the plan was rendered impossible by the illness of her daughter-in-law, who by her imprudence and heedlessness had brought on a premature confinement of a dead child, and was too ill for Mrs. Cameron to think of leaving her.

"Poor Agnes!" Annie murmured, but her heart was scarcely with her words.

She followed her father when the time came for the party to leave the room to dress for dinner; silently they ascended together to the room prepared for the General, his arm caressingly encircling the waist of his darling daughter, the beating throbs of whose heart he must have felt.

But when they stood within the room, and after he had again tenderly embraced her, Annie fixed her eager, inquiring gaze upon him.

The General turned away, almost, as it seemed, impatiently, saying—

"We must dress—my dear girl, let us not talk on the subject yet, for Heaven's sake."

"Oh, Papa, only one word," she said beseechingly, "do not keep me in suspense, only one word. Is there any hope?"

"My dearest child," the General answered hurriedly, "it is not a business to be despatched in one word, so let us wait till we have time to discuss it more fully. Here! I have a letter for you from your

mother, which you shall read after dinner and before we go to bed—"

He had drawn the said letter from his pocket when a valet's opportune entrance saved the General further trouble in evading or entering upon the subject from which he seemed to shrink with such ominous dislike. Annie took possession of the letter and flew with it to her room. The maid was waiting to dress her: she was forced therefore to suffer her to unbind her hair, and prepare for its arrangement, but forgetting all in her anxiety and absorption, she hastily broke the seal and opened the letter.

Eagerly, with beating heart, her eyes glanced over its contents—No harsh, or even reproachful expression was there to wound her—but the language of complaint mingled in the strains of the most gentle tenderness that ever mother addressed to a daughter—to her Annie, the lightener of all her parents' weight of care—the bright star in the midst of all their troubles and anxieties—to whom they ever turned for hope, in contemplating her prospects for the future.

Her mother, after an affecting summary of her cares—her increasing burdens and perplexities, expatiating upon her own decreasing buoyancy of spirit to support her, added that she reposed with perfect confidence and security upon her beloved child, whose well regulated mind would at once resign itself to filial obedience, who would not she was sure willingly add one *item* to the load of trouble under which her parents struggled. It would break her heart, and send her father to the grave with disappointment to see the daughter for whose welfare such bright hopes had been raised, throw herself away by so improvident a marriage. Alas! they had but too true a specimen of the imprudence of love matches, in her brother Gerald's case—in the accession of care which the thoughtless act of one of their children had entailed upon them.

Poor Annie, she had dismissed her maid, and when her father entered to lead her down to dinner he found the poor girl seated—her dark hair streaming around her in hopeless despair.

"My own Annie, I cannot bear this," he said, after gazing on her for a moment, and tears rolled down his manly cheek.

Annie started at the sight.

"He weeping for me," she thought, "oh! no, no, no! Father, dear father!" she exclaimed, rising and throwing her arms round his neck. "I am better—much better now; go down to dinner, and when you see me again I shall be quite well—it was only at first, and Mamma's letter is so kind—so affectionate; oh! you will see how I *can* bear it," she added with a sad smile, "for her sake and yours."

We will not enter into all that transpired the next day. Suffice it to say that even the father's fond, indulgent heart had nerved itself to listen to the dictates of prudence which bade him, for the supposed advantage of his child, harden himself against its contrary impulses, assisted as he was in his difficult task by the noble fortitude, the meek heroism with which his daughter saw all lingering hopes vanishing away. For her father had looked into the aspect and prospect of poor Frank Mildmay's affairs; alas! they were not more bright or promising than two years before, and Annie, with pale, yet wonderful composure of voice and countenance, resigned herself to necessity, and relinquished all hope.

She asked only to be allowed to see Frank Mildmay again, and from her own lips communicate to him the final sentence.

"Who but I, can soften the shock that sentence will occasion?" she thought; "Who but his poor Annie inspire him with fortitude and resignation?"

"Can you not trust me, father?" she said, as the General spoke dubiously as to the judiciousness of acceding to the proposition.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THEY went that night to Almack's. Poor Annie! she looked indeed a very different creature, as she entered leaning on her father's arm, from the blooming Hebe, who four weeks before, gleamed upon her lover's sight.

Frank Mildmay saw her enter.

"Dear Annie," the young man thought, "your brightness is indeed dimmed, and I have been the blighting cause."

He pressed through the crowd in the direction of the spot where the General stood with his daughter,—his eyes as anxiously and nervously glancing round, as those of the young creature leaning on his arm.

Mildmay soon stood by their side. The General shook the young man warmly by the hand; but there was an expression of pain and concern upon his manly countenance. Annie had soon slipped her arm from within his, and the father was the next moment following with his eyes the pale young couple, as they made their way to the refreshment room.

"Oh, Frank! why are we to endure all this agony again?" said Annie; "I thought it too hard to endure, two years ago, but now it seems so far—far worse."

"Annie," Frank at length murmured, "is there no hope left of winning your parents' consent?"

"None, Frank."

"And why?"

Annie only sighed deeply.

"And yet you say," Frank continued, "that their chief aim is your happiness."

Again a heavy sigh.

"Oh, Annie, were we only married," the young man said, bending down his eyes, as if to avoid meeting the gaze of his companion. "If we were once married, and they saw how sufficient was our love, to constitute our happiness—how few were the trials—the sacrifices your marriage had entailed upon you—for do you think, Annie, I would ever allow you to suffer deprivation? would it not be my study, my labour to ward off every blast of trouble or of sorrow, which my power could stay? what would I not do? what sacrifice would I not make to secure your comfort, dearest?...when they saw how happy you were—how I adored you, then would they not be joyful too?"

"I do not understand you, Frank," Annie said sadly and hopelessly.

"Oh, Annie," Frank continued in a low, hurried voice, "if you loved as I love, you would not be so slow of comprehension—you would know what I mean; can we not do as others have done before us—marry, and trust to your parents' love—to their indulgence, to reconcile them to the step. Annie—" and he seized her hand, "can you—can you refuse me? Will you not fly with me? Is your love not strong enough for that?"

Annie turned her head slowly away, but it was only to collect her bewildered senses.

"Your brother," Frank Mildmay persisted, "how did he win his wife?"

"Frank, Frank, I never thought you would have become my tempter!" exclaimed Annie, and she turned her clear eyes upon him with sad, sweet reproach. "But you cannot be serious—you cannot mean what you ask me to do."

"I only ask what others have done, for love such as you profess for me, Annie."

"Profess!"—the cold word wounded Annie's heart. She hid her face in her hands, and sobbed.

Frank thought he had prevailed—

"Think, think," he urged, "all our misery in a few hours may be at an end for ever—that misery, which must else be everlasting."

Annie shuddered.

"Do you shudder at the idea of flying with me?"

"Yes, Frank, even with you—at the idea of having yielded, even in thought, to such an act—to betray the love and confidence which my parents so implicitly place in me—to send bitter sorrow, shame and disappointment into their kind hearts. But I could not," she continued passion-

ately, "deceive my father, my darling, kind, noble-minded father, who feels for me almost as painfully as I feel for myself. Do you think, Frank, that I could appear before him with such a secret purpose in my heart—and conceal it—I could not if I would—I could not hide it in my face—in my voice. You have seen the truth and openness with which we are all brought up, and do you wish to make one of that family a deceiver—an ungrateful, graceless daughter? It would destroy the peace of all—yes, ruin us—destroy us, Frank—my father would never hold up his head again, as he has done; his glory would, indeed, have departed." And Annie lifted up her face, beaming through its tearful sadness, with truth and purity of intention. Deeply pained, she abruptly rose, murmuring—

"Take me to my father."

"Annie, Annie, forgive me; but I am a miserable, wretched man."

Annie placed her hand tenderly in his; she could not speak.

The General, almost before he was aware of their approach, found his pale daughter again on his arm, but was saved the sight of the agonized countenance of her conductor. He had resigned her and vanished.

"My brave, good girl!" the father murmured, as a short time after he beheld the countenance of his daughter, composed, though so pale, and heard her voice calmly reassuring his own anxiety.

"You were made, my child, for a soldier's daughter," the General soothingly exclaimed.

"And a soldier's wife, Father," Annie added with a smile, and then sighed as if her heart were breaking.

Three weeks after this last scene, Mrs. Cameron was crossing the Channel with feelings, far from an enviable nature. She had just left one daughter narrowly saved from the gates of death—and now was hurrying to the spot where, as by a sudden blight, her pride, her flower of promise, on which all her bright hopes were fixed, was languishing—drooping—fading they told her—and what was worse, in the mother's secret soul there was the bitter knowledge, that it was herself who had caused the mischief. Yet, did she even now feel inclined to draw out the weapon which rankled in the wound—to speak the word which alone could heal it? For she knew by the General's letters, that it was but for her to say "well, let it be," and every prudent scruple, every worldly view which moved him, would melt away. Annie had borne up for some little time as bravely as she had begun. Frank Mildmay had left London, it was thought, and that she might not have time and opportunity to brood over

her sorrows, in mistaken kindness she was taken out every night: and in order to reassure her father, who accompanied her, she, poor girl, endeavoured to assume a show of cheerfulness in the gay scenes now so distasteful to every feeling.

But the effort proved at length above the actual strength of her young heart—Annie's spirits suddenly sank beyond the possibility of rallying. One morning, after an assembly in which she had shone with most unnatural lustre as its brightest gem, she appeared with the most ghastly pallor on her cheeks and a deadness and languor of eye; and when questioned by her anxious father and friends, for the first time since the termination of her love affair, the poor girl gave way to a violent burst of emotion, and sobbed on her father's bosom an anxious prayer for her mother.

Beautiful example of the magic power dwelling in the name of Mother!—that power which in its simple, unadulterated influence on the heart of the child, may be honoured as the type of that higher, holier relationship subsisting between a Christian and his God! the simple, child-like faith which moves him to look up in joy, with love and praise to the Giver of every good thing—in sorrow to stretch out his arms to that same All-wise Being—to look for comfort, confide implicitly on the hand by which the wound may have been inflicted, even though the dart has entered into his very soul.

And our poor Annie!—when her heart and strength began to fail, she called for the mother on whose kind bosom her young griefs had ever been soothed, whose eyes had ever kindled gladness in her soul—no shade of accusation or reproach entered into her filial heart. Yet might she not have exclaimed in the bitterness of her soul, and been forgiven—"Is this a mother's love, to break a daughter's heart?" But there was no sign of reproach in Annie's look and voice, when she strove to smile a cheerful welcome in her mother's face.

Mrs. Cameron was shocked—nay, distracted at the change in her darling child, whose patient suffering cut her to the heart. As for the General—he fairly declared that he could not endure the sight of it any longer—and doubted much as to whether the conduct they were pursuing did not amount to cruelty.

Mrs. Cameron made no reply to this, but her silent uneasiness told perhaps more surely that a struggle had already commenced in her mind—a painful struggle indeed, when it was the destruction of her brightest and long-cherished hopes; and which, if based on pride and worldliness, renders the pang even more bitter and mortifying.

But however hard the combat, the force of maternal tenderness and love prevailed at last. Mrs. Cameron entered her husband's presence the third morning after her arrival, her countenance more quiet and composed, than it had been since her arrival, though pale and subdued; and yet she had come for the purpose of telling him that she was vanquished also—even to implore her husband to sanction the marriage of their poor Annie with Frank Mildmay.

Gently—cautiously, the parents allowed the light of hope and joy to break in upon the young heart so darkened by despair.

"God bless you, father—God bless you, mother!" were the only words spoken by Annie, to pour forth her feelings in her mother's arms—but there was that in their fervent accents which spoke a fullness of joy no tongue can express.

What now remained to be done, but to trace and discover the disconsolate lover, and draw him from the depth of despair into which he had plunged, to the new light and life in store for him?

Frank Mildmay had soon received an intimation from the General that his presence was required at Stratheden House.

We need not attempt to describe the feelings with which the summons was obeyed, far less those which filled his heart when the hand of Annie was placed by her parents in his own—Annie, his beloved, whose heart had nearly broken from their separation, as her altered appearance so plainly bespoke.

And the parents told him, they gave up a treasure with which they owned they were loth to part, but it was to make her happy, and they did not repent—he must be worthy to have gained the love of such a heart.

Annie's parting with her parents, after her marriage, and on sailing to the East, was one of peculiar anguish. Tears flowed from her eyes, of which it would have seemed that months only could efface the traces. But days—nay, hours had fled, and found them wiped away, or lingering but as glittering drops in that sunshine of perfect felicity which wrapped in Elysium the souls of the wedded lovers.

Strange power, this wedded love, which can thus bid rest the waves of natural affection planted in the human heart; strongest mystic influence, which can thus turn the tame, tasteless waters of life into the rosier, richest wine, to cheer the heart in this dark, sad vale of tears!

Poor Lena! where was that power to cheer *your* heart, and fill your pining soul, in the luxurious saloons and princely domains of your proud home?—where that blessed influence which transformed the low cabin, or the open, noisy deck, into as gay a bower, as peaceful and fair a haunt

to those two "outward bound," as ever marriage tour supplied, or newly-wedded pair desired? All in all to one another, what circumstance could narrow their happiness, or disturb their inward peace and joy?

Annie was more lovely in her husband's eyes—the presiding genius of their cabin—overruling every difficulty, patiently and cheerfully enduring, and laughing over the discomfort and inconvenience he so bewailed on her account—dearer to his heart, as smilingly leaning on his arm he supported her steps with such tender care on the giddy deck, far lovelier, dearer, than she had ever been, in the easy, careless comfort of her childhood's home, or bounding in ball-room beauty by his side. And truly their present position was a trial—theirs no flowery path to tread, such as usually attend the first steps of newly-married couples. Yet, who of all that ship's crew, from the highest to the rudest tar, did not think that the young officer who called that peerless little gem of beauty his wife, was a lucky fellow? Who did not learn to love—yet honour more than love—the sunny glance of her brilliant eye—the sweet, pure radiance of her smile?

What, then, had not these two become to one another when, the four months' passage over, they landed on a foreign strand? We cannot enter with any minuteness into their history at that time. The district to which the Hussars were sent, was then in peace and security, though wars and rumours of wars were heard in the country around. The life of Frank Mildmay and his wife was rendered happy by their complete absorption in each other, their love unaffected by clime or country—their health also suffering little from its influence, they were able to enjoy themselves in spite of every opposing circumstance.

Novelty itself is pleasing and interesting to the fresh, excitable mind of youth, and with constitution and spirit to combat against its trials, an Indian station is full of amusing variety and cheerful society—though like all other societies, possessing its disadvantages—its temptations and dangers, often prejudicial to the young, most exposed to their influence.

The Mildmays were necessarily drawn into the society surrounding them—which, tinged with the influences more or less acquired by a residence in India, is neither the safest nor best for the inexperienced who mingle in it. But our young couple suffered not; their mutual love would have been a shield and buckler against any temptations which to them as to others, presented themselves—and both their minds imbued with earlier, deeper principles, would have led them

through fire and water, unscathed, when weaker hearts might have been shivered by a breath.

Annie Mildmay, as may be imagined, with her beauty and attractions, was an object of universal admiration and adulation—but even if the exercise of principle was uncalled for in her case, to whom temptation was no temptation—sense and discretion, the natural suggestions of a delicate mind—the fruit of seed sown in the soil of a pure and happy heart by a good and judicious education, sufficed to preserve her the fine undimmed gold—the bright and distant star—unsullied by a breath, nay, thought of evil, in all the scenes and circumstances of her married life. Of Frank Mildmay it will be enough to say, that he proved in every way worthy of the treasure he had so hardly won, to find indeed its price inestimable. Ah, were there more of such treasures to be won, would there not be found perchance more husbands worthy to possess them?

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Oh, you that have the charge of love,
Keep him in rosy bondage bound,
As in the fields of bliss above,
He sits with flowerets fettered round;—
Loose not a tie that round him clings,
Nor ever let him use his wings;
For even an hour—a minute's flight
Will rob the plumes of half their light.

MOORE.

SEVEN months the young couple—Gerald Cameron and his bride—had remained under the kind and indulgent shelter of the parental roof, and then they went forth to enter upon the chances and changes of a military career in a distant quarter of Ireland. How charmed had Agnes been with all the incidents of her new position; above all, the perfect independence attached to it! Gerald was quite angry at first on hearing the fervour of her self-gratulation. He thought it both ungrateful and unreasonable, after all the happiness she had enjoyed—all the kindness and affection so freely lavished upon her by his family.

But Agnes had smoothed his brow by declaring, that with all her love for his parents and sisters, it was still the greatest delight to have him all to herself—no one to divide with her even his thoughts—to be mistress of his home, were it only a barrack room—to be his only companion—in short, his *all in all*.

But though there might have been much of truth in these declarations, there was as much we fear in the false estimate of liberty, and independence, which the hurtful thralldom of her early life had engendered. The harsh, heavy chains had left a soreness, which caused her to shrink

from the gentlest bonds which love could cast around her. Liberty was her *beau idéal* of happiness—freedom to follow the inclinations of her heart with none to say her nay!—to be free as the air—free as a bird on the wing. Such was the seemingly unobjectionable theory with which she started on her new career. But liberty is a dangerous standard for a young wife to set up with no surer guide to direct her course. Even the strength of real love which had sprung up in the heart of Agnes for her husband, might not be sufficient to counteract the follies so often committed under the much abused name of liberty. Mrs. Gerald Cameron was not long in affording a specimen of such follies—certainly mere follies they were—springing entirely from her total ignorance and inexperience of the world, and the rules of society, but not on this account fraught with less anxiety and annoyance to her young husband. For instance, one day, when he returned home, after having been some hours absent on duty, he heard the sound of music and dancing, and found his apartment invaded by several brother officers, whom his wife, to beguile her solitude, had invited to teach her to waltz, and with one of whom she was flying round with a dexterity which showed her to have proved an apt scholar.

This was not, as may be imagined, very pleasant to Gerald's feelings; even though she greeted him with a real delight, which showed her occupation to have been but a *faute de mieux*. It was not jealousy from which he suffered, but distress at the imprudence and indiscretion which this trait evinced in Agnes, and which if persevered in, might prove injurious to herself, and a source of anxiety to others.

Besides, he was very fastidious as to the conduct of women; inheriting this tenacity of feeling from his father. From his cradle too he had been surrounded by examples of purity and grace; his ideas of the female character were exalted in the extreme, but never till he married had he felt how precious the name and fame of woman can be to the heart of man.

"Agnes," he said, when they were left alone, "I don't approve of this."

"Of what, Gerald?" she asked.

"Why, of all this waltzing, and nonsense, when I am out of the way."

"What can be the harm?"

"Harm!" repeated the husband, "if your own instinct does not instruct you—I cannot explain. But at any rate I don't like it," he concluded hastily, for he was not an adept in the lecturing capacity.

"No, indeed, Gerald, my instinct does not tell me why I ought to sit stupidly alone all the afternoon—dreaming that I was at the Towers again. You don't like my walking out with Mrs. Jones the adju-

tant's wife; and so, as those men passed the window, and spoke to me about not waltzing last night, I just thought it would be such a nice way of passing the time if they were to come in and have a practise. Captain Forde you know plays so beautifully on the piano. I did not imagine you would grudge me this little amusement."

And Gerald's fair lady pouted her lip as she perceived him by his countenance to be little more satisfied by her explanation.

"But I will not do so again if you disapprove of it," she continued after a slight pause, her husband's silence and rather contemptuous shrug, as he had turned away after her former speech, taking more effect, from it being to her so new a way of treating her follies on his part.

But Gerald felt indeed much provoked, and ashamed of the childish want of discretion his wife's words implied.

If he could never leave her for an hour with the certainty of her being able to remain in privacy at home—it seemed indeed a bad look-out for both. He was too young and high-spirited himself to make much allowance for the youth and inexperience of his companion, as a sober, or older head might have done, and therefore took much to heart all the strange mad proceedings of his wild young wife. For it is not to be supposed that his troubles ended in this one case—although Agnes did promise, and with faithful intention, not to practise waltzing again (but with the chairs) in his absence—no! daily—hourly did she try his patience, and shock his sensitive feelings of propriety by her *escapades*—monkey tricks they were—harmless in their nature, but exactly what might have been expected from a vivacious temperament—unrestrained by much strength of mind—which had burst at once from the slavery of an iron rule such as that under which she had been educated. The young creature was intoxicated by the excitement of such new scenes—such a different existence.

Certainly, if any friends of a noble-minded, warm-hearted, and high-principled young man, desire to discipline his counteracting features of unsteadiness or thoughtlessness, or any such like faults which may mar the perfections of his nature, let them but wish him to take to himself a madcap wife such as Agnes; for they will find no surer sobering, steadying power, to work their will. It may be deemed a desperate experiment, a kill or cure case, a remedy as likely to ruin as sober him—but to one like Gerald, with high principle, warm, deep affections, this above-mentioned infliction will generally be found to render him a sadder, yet surely a wiser man.

Agnes herself would laughingly tell him that he quite frightened and bewildered her at times, and made her think

that he had changed places with his gentle melancholy brother—she was sure if she now saw them even both together, as she had once done separately, she should mistake one for the other—she wished he would not make himself so like Alick; for she did not like his twin brother half so much, she ardently declared, to Gerald's amusement, who said that the sentiment was certainly very flattering to his feelings.

"For first of all," Agnes said, "I am sure Alick hates me, for having taken you away from him, dear Gerald; and secondly, I have never recovered the shame and disappointment of my mistake that awful night at the Towers, and I could never feel myself at ease in his presence."

As for Gerald's friends, they were rather amused at the taming process which they beheld going forward on both the young people, when they occasionally visited the couple; for they knew that as long as matters remained in the first harmless stage, more good than evil would be worked in the end, than injury or trouble to either. For with all Agnes's inconsiderate ways and total ignorance of things in general—they had confidence in the strong, grateful love she felt towards her husband—to act as a preserving charm over the material happiness of their son, whose affection on his side for his fair tormentor seemed but to increase, in a manner to justify the observation, that there is nothing like giving a little trouble to rivet more closely the chains of love—rather a dangerous maxim, by the bye, requiring much tact and judiciousness to preserve therein the proper line. Young wives, most particularly we would advise you to beware!

Agnes was much shielded from responsibility in the eyes and heart of her husband and his family, by the excuses ever presented by her early education. Every spark of reproach or ill-feeling which her indiscretion excited, was levelled on her mother. And so it is in general, whether justly or unjustly—praise or reproach is ever the mother's portion, for good or evil management of her daughters. The glory or the shame is hers, as they turn out ill or well.

Poor mothers! hard responsibility is yours; for there are waves and storms of the human heart, which no human power can restrain: and perhaps even Lady Rachel had too much blame cast upon her; for under the shadow of the indulgence which this idea of her education engendered, Agnes's indiscretions increased a hundred-fold in number, and the provoked husband's patience in time began to wax faint.

The state of affairs began to wear rather a threatening aspect for future happiness ere the first matrimonial year had passed

away. That period found Agnes within a few months of becoming a mother. She was far from being strong enough to bear, without risk, the careless recklessness with which she would fain have regarded her delicate state of health; and much trouble had it caused those around her, to keep the thoughtless creature within any bounds of prudence, and to preserve her from the evil consequences of her folly.

It was a fine Spring afternoon that Gerald left his wife at home, on a sofa surrounded by lace and ribbons of every hue; a baby's cap she held in her hand, showing the interesting employment in which she had been engaged, whilst the pair were chatting merrily and happily together; Gerald laughingly admiring her performance, and inquiring how Miss Ricketts had managed to make her such an adept in the manufacture of babies' caps, for it certainly seemed the only accomplishment she had brought away with her from the Towers.

"Because it was the only thing she did not teach me, that is the reason, I suppose," the young wife answered, with a laugh; "trimming caps and bonnets, and all that sort of thing, was my taste from a child; how I kept it up Heaven only knows! for I was scarcely ever allowed even a doll to dress, and to twist my piece of bonnet ribbon into fanciful knots on the large ugly thing I had to wear, was all the practice I had in the art. But, now you see, since I have thrown my weary music away, over which I had to slave and slave for hours together just because I hated it, and have forgotten all about those horrid books I had to pore and pore over from week's end to week's end, with their brown backs scratched over with ugly faces, and wretched victims' names, now you see what I can do."

"Yes! trim bonnets and caps without end, and all kinds of fandangos," laughed Gerald; "and run up bills yards long for ribbons and lace."

"Well, I am sure that is more useful than rattling on the piano, like our next-door neighbour; or dashing dirty paint about, like the Colonel's wife. As for ribbon and lace, your mother gave me every bit of that, so you need not look as if I had just ruined you. It is very good of her—but, ah me! if I had but the old point and Mechlin, growing yellow in Lady Rachel's stores! Those little Beauchamps! they had everything new from Mrs. Moon's; such robes! such caps! but after all, they were not prettier than this, I am sure," she added, holding up her handiwork before her eyes, and complacently inspecting it.

"But I cannot stand talking nonsense any longer," said Gerald, after having

chatted with his little wife in this strain some time; "make as many caps as possible to keep you quiet till I return."

"Oh, Gerald, are you going to leave me, and am I to sit all alone by myself dull and stupid?" exclaimed Agnes.

"What, with these caps to make?" Gerald said.

"Oh! it is very pleasant working when I have any one to look at me and talk to me—but I soon tire by myself. Really, I hope Captain Forde, or somebody else will pay me a visit," she added, colouring, as Gerald looked round suspiciously and anxiously as he was preparing to depart. "Well, what's the matter?" Agnes remarked, with forced calmness.

"Agnes!" Gerald began, in a voice slightly tremulous, "I hope I may go away with confidence that——"

"Gerald, are you beginning again with all that tiresome nonsense? you really have become so suspicious and cross, I am as frightened to say a word before you, as if you were Lady Rachel herself," she answered, pettishly. "I am sure I wish I was hideous, and then you would not mind what I did. I believe you would like to shut me up as Lionel does Lena, and never let any one see me but yourself."

Gerald turned away from her with a glance of some impatience.

"Agnes," he said, "you must I am sure know very well by this time what are my notions and opinions on the subject. I have tried till I am quite tired, to make you understand why I do not like all the foolish flirtations and nonsense in which you indulge—I know you *mean* no harm—it is only your weak love of admiration; but as for its being harmless, it cannot possibly be so in its consequences either to your name or mine in the end. So now, Agnes, just be so good as to tell me—before I go out—do you intend following either of the schemes you hinted at just now?—I mean, to go out in the car with that silly party, or to admit any one to sit and talk nonsense to you whilst I am away—come, tell me—I'd rather at any rate that you were open with me; I cannot brook being deceived," and he spoke these last words with some bitterness!

"I dare say you do not," Agnes answered, casting down her 'witching eyes,' and twisting the satin ribbon into rolls, "and if I said I *would*, pray what would you do? lock me up, you tyrant?—or send me back to the Towers, from which I believe you heartily wish you had never taken me?"

"No, Agnes, neither!" Gerald answered with tolerable patience, though the colour started to his brow, "but I should not certainly think it right, if you do such things,

to allow you to stay here any longer—I should send you to Athlone."

"Well, then," Agnes replied, after a slight pause, "of course I do not intend," and a provoking smile curled her lips.

Poor Gerald looked at her as if he did not know whether to be satisfied or not. However, he kissed her as she threw her arms caressingly round his neck—and immediately after departed with somewhat of a heavy heart. For the fact was, alas! Agnes had become a flirt—a harmless flirt it is true, if such a thing exists—but there was one point still worse to her husband's noble, straightforward mind—her silly flirting manner was but a secondary source of anxiety to him, for he trusted implicitly on her affection from guarding her from any real danger; but Gerald had by degrees begun to make the painful discovery that there was a flaw in his young wife's character more inimical to anything like security or confidence—a want of perfect truth and openness—a certain tincture of cunning it might almost be called, which he took more to heart than any open show of thoughtless vivacity or childish indiscretion. It was so strange a defect to him—to one of a family through which truth ran like a vein of gold, from father to son—from mother to daughter. He was long before he could understand this part of her character, for there was a sort of simplicity, nay, even frankness, if it might so be called, in her very deceitfulness—calculated perhaps to render the fault less grave to the common eye—though no less displeasing to the sober sense of his truthful vision. And even now, no sooner had Gerald finally departed, than Agnes started up, cleared away her work, looked from the windows as if in expectation, called her maid, bade her prepare her walking-dress, and half an hour after Gerald's departure, equipped in the gayest of flaunting attires (for smart dress was one of Agnes's foibles) she was sallying forth with the adjutant's wife—a showy-looking woman—and accompanied by two officers also, was soon proceeding at a brisk pace in the before-mentioned Irish car, laughing and talking in thoughtless merriment.

We will not accompany the party on their heedless trip. Suffice it to say, that on Gerald's return home at six o'clock, he found his wife reclining on the same spot where he had left her; but though she strove to assume an appearance of careless unconcern, answering his affectionate interrogatories concerning her doings during his absence, with evasions and prevarications, she could not conceal a change of countenance which soon excited his attention.

"Are you not going to change your dress for dinner?" Gerald asked, when the

dinner time arrived, and she still retained her position with one small foot tucked up under her dress, and growing paler and paler as if in evident pain.

"No, I don't feel well enough to dress, but give me your arm and let us go to dinner."

But as soon as she put her foot to the ground she screamed.

"I cannot walk, I have hurt my foot."

"Hurt it—how, Agnes?" asked Gerald.

"Knocked it—sprained it I think;" and she writhed with pain.

Gerald called her maid, and continued questioning her further on the subject, but without gaining any satisfactory information as to the means by which the injury was inflicted.

The surgeon was sent for, and he pronounced it certainly a severe sprain; still, the worse it became, the more obstinately Agnes held out in concealing the truth, and Gerald heard at length by mere chance, that his wife had been out that afternoon in the car, that an accident had nearly taken place, and in her fright she had sprung out and fallen.

It was not from any of her accomplices that he gained this intelligence; they were sworn to secrecy, and Gerald returned home in sorrow more than anger—stung to the quick.

But he had decided on his course with the rapid impulse of his character.

"Agnes," he said, "I have taken places in the coach to Athlone for to-morrow morning—now, no crying, it is of no use—you know why—very well."

"The journey will kill me, you will see if it does not," persisted the weeping Agnes, as she reclined despairingly on the sofa, watching the preparations for her departure.

"A quiet journey is far less likely to kill you than staying here, when I cannot turn my back without your getting into mischief; besides I told you that you should leave this place if you disobeyed me, and I always keep my word—you are not to be trusted—I have made arrangements for your perfect comfort, and go you shall."

And they went. Agnes ill from the effects of her fall, but endeavouring to conceal all she suffered!

They arrived however at Athlone in safety, and for a week after, Agnes remained much in the same state. But we have heard the fearful consequences of her imprudence—how the child she so ardently longed to possess was lost—she so narrowly escaping the same fate—though mercifully spared to her afflicted husband, who, receiving her back to life and health—with the comfortable hope of a perfect reformation—set about with fresh zest to spoil, by his affection and indul-

gence, all the good work which might have been effected, by the subduing powers of a sick bed and the temporary loss of her beauty.

When Mrs. Cameron had been called away to Annie, she had left the invalid under auspices most favourable to the furtherance of her mental improvement.

When the intelligence of the dangerous illness of their young sister reached the ears of Ralph Beauchamp and Rachel, they availed themselves of the repeated invitation of General and Mrs. Cameron to visit them, and arrived in time to find Agnes partially recovered, their presence enabling Mrs. Cameron with more comfort to leave her.

Rachel prolonged her stay after her brother's departure, although she was loth to leave, even for a time, the kind home he had provided for her. With the most paternal tenderness had Ralph Beauchamp established his sister under his roof. And he was not content to stop there. He strove to render her what she would already have been under different auspices from those untoward circumstances which had surrounded her from the cradle.

There was doubtless much to undo, which time only could accomplish; yet it was a noble nature on which to work; and a grateful and pleasant task it proved to watch the gradual improvement which—under the gentle influences of religion and a peaceful home—became daily perceptible in Rachel.

"She does you much credit indeed," Mrs. Cameron said to Ralph during the time they were together in Ireland, whilst conversing on the subject of his sister. "What an excellent wife you are fitting her to make! The next step you take, will be to marry her well, I suppose?"

A quiet smile stole over Mr. Beauchamp's countenance. "You give me credit for what I do not deserve, Mrs. Cameron," he answered; "I cannot say I have any such active views with respect to Rachel, and I am happy to say she evinces no anxiety to change her present condition of life—no," he continued more seriously, "I shall be quite content to see Rachel an *excellent woman*, and then, whether married or single—as it may be her choice or lot to remain—she will equally prove an ornament—or what is still more important—a blessing to society."

"Oh, Mr. Beauchamp, I fear you and I shall never agree on that subject; whatever may be your own ideas as to the blessings of celibacy, I trust you do not extend the theory to us poor women."

"Far from it, Mrs. Cameron—there is no theory or rule in the case, I should say, either with men or women—but you—the mother of daughters, is it your highest aim and purpose concerning them that they should marry!"

"Yes, Mr. Beauchamp, I confess that it is my most earnest desire for them that they should marry well, and I am miserable when they do not."

Mrs. Cameron certainly fell some degrees in Mr. Beauchamp's estimation after this frank confession. From all he had seen of her in the capacity of a mother, he had been impressed by the idea of her excellency and judicious manner of proceeding—but now, as his mind reverted to his brother's wife, he saw too plainly, that her fate was the first fruits of the sentiments thus candidly expressed by Mrs. Cameron.

"Ah! I see—you feel contempt for me! I ought not thus openly to have condemned myself," she said.

"No, Mrs. Cameron, not that—although I must own myself surprised—From what I have seen and heard of the education of your daughters, I should have imagined it far from your aim, exclusively to prepare them to make advantageous marriages; rather should I have believed that your view was to fit them for a single state, by furnishing them with resources for solitary hours, instead of filling their young minds with the idea that the married state alone is essential to happiness."

Mrs. Cameron rather winced at these home trusts, and said she hoped indeed her daughters would not be found wanting in either case—yet certainly she must confess she thought that the more charming and perfect the woman the greater the pity that her life should be wasted in single blessedness. But Mr. Beauchamp found fault again with this sentiment. Capacity and goodness could never be wasted; there were services and duties in every state of life to execute well and zealously. The All-wise disposer has some work for every one to perform—the single as well as the married.

Much more did Ralph Beauchamp say on the subject both wise and good; but no greater impression did it make on Mrs. Cameron than that Mr. Beauchamp was a very good man, but could never preach her out of the conviction, that it was wisest, discreetest, best, to marry her daughters as well and as speedily as she possibly could.

And what had become of the Hobsons? for the shutters of the new house remained closed, the plate had vanished from the door, which had borne that well-known name for so many a long year from father to son.

The bride and bridegroom, after touring on the Rhine, had gone to London that Mr. Hobson might take possession of his wife's fortune; and having received it, unhampered by settlements or other impediments, he and his fair lady retired to Scotland, near some of his relations, where they lived and roved on the fat of the land;

as if thirty thousand pounds were funds inexhaustible wherewith to maintain themselves, and Scotch cousins innumerable, who flocked round their enriched English kinsman and his high-born wife. And in these two years of plenty we will leave them for the present, to follow the more interesting personages of our narrative.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"No fear makes pale her cheek :
 * * * * *
 But all is free as air, as fresh as youth,
 As clear from care as untouched innocence."
 BARRY CORNWALL.

Mrs. CAMERON's third daughter, Janet, was now to come out. Her first season was to be spent under the charge of the Duchess. Janet was a splendid girl, and one whom her Grace saw at once was more certain to attract universal admiration than either of her sisters: for there was a pleasing novelty in the character of her beauty. That raven hair—those azure eyes were of themselves calculated to engage the approbation of the *blasé* eyes of the world. She was tall, and of a finer figure, so to speak, than the lily Lena—or the lovely fairy Annie—her complexion rich and clear!

Mrs. Cameron was very much gratified when the Duchess's report of her third daughter reached her, and she learnt that Janet also had turned out a beauty, and gave promise of great things in the way of matrimony. It caused her, however, a sharp pang of remembrance to hear amongst her daughter's chief partners and admirers—a class too general as yet, the Duchess wrote, to admit of any serious attentions—some well-known names.

"Lord Alfred Townshend was an excellent *parti*," her Grace continued, "rich—and with only one brother—as yet unmarried—between him and the Marquise—but he, unfortunately, was only a bird of passage, having imbibed, since he left the army, a great taste for the continent." Perhaps the noble chaperone was a little relieved of the burden of anxiety—her desire to acquit herself well in her duties—entailed upon her, by a letter received from Mrs. Cameron shortly after the above mentioned communication. Her friend said, after having slightly alluded to her notice of Lord Alfred, and some other communication on the subject of her daughter, that she was in no hurry for Janet to marry—No, she had been too sorely cured of her mistaken sentiments on the advantages of early marriages. She must know more of the character of the man, however eligible, with whom she could desire the union of a daughter—She

trusted her subdued heart was reaping benefit from disappointment and defeated hopes. The Duchess hoped so too, and that for her own sake her friend would begin to take things more quietly, and not worry and harass herself uselessly to gain an end, the expediency of which she could never quite understand: namely, her eagerness to marry her daughters so very early—a propensity her Grace could not help thinking partook rather of the nature of the animal, who attends her progeny with anxious solicitude, until her maternal services are no longer required, then breaks the tender tie and chases her nurslings away—to know them no more!

Mrs. Cameron was almost as unconscious as her friend the Duchess, as to any double-mindedness in the sentiments she had expressed in her letter. Alas! a worldly heart turns us far aside, even from truthfulness to one's own conscience!

Lord Alfred had again perhaps caught her matchmaking fancy. Her old castles in the air again appeared before her imagination—her defeated hopes again blazed forth with regard to Janet. Would it not be better to wait in the hopes of marrying him, than to accept, on the spot, any others?

Janet then she received gladly back—if not unwooed, at least unwon—whether heart whole, or fancy free, we need not quite determine: at any rate, Mrs. Cameron resolved that it should not be from forgetfulness of him whom her daughter owned had been her favourite and most delightful partner in London, and who—she had blushing informed her mother—once whispered in her ear, *that it had been his brightest dream to marry one of Mrs. Cameron's daughters.*

The probability of Janet being *that* daughter, it was the mother's aim to impress upon the mind of the young girl, and it is easy to imagine that such an idea, left on the glowing imagination of scarcely eighteen summers, may sink deeper and deeper, till it reach the heart. It is not difficult to prophesy what might be the result—what hopes and expectations gave such bright colouring to Janet's expectations, when looking forward to next spring's campaign—for the kind Duchess had promised her another season.

But Mrs. Cameron might have deemed that fate again, as in the case of Lena, had some signal intentions with regard to Janet's destiny, also: for, alas! that next London season found them under circumstances more apparently destructive to any immediate furtherance of her wishes, than during the *sojourn* at secluded East-borne—a period to which the mother's mind now reverted with the dreadful feeling of poignant remorse—and now having brought the blooming third daughter be-

fore our readers, we must leave her for the present.

A long and different road we have to travel ere we can carry Janet from the point to which we have brought her. We must cross the seas, and find ourselves in India, where, alas! the scene is changed to Frank and Annie Mildmay.

CHAPTER XXX.

"Clasp me a little longer, on the brink
Of fate! while I can feel thy dear caress;
And when this heart hath ceased to beat, oh think
And let it mitigate thy woe's excess
That thou hast been to me all tenderness,
And friend more than human friendship just.
Oh! by that retrospect of happiness
And by the hopes of an immortal trust,
God shall assuage thy pangs, when I am laid in dust."

Gertrude of Wyoming.

How short a moment of bliss had been allowed to the wedded pair; for nearer and nearer rolled the storm of battle—clearer and clearer!

When Mildmay was called upon to set forth at the head of his troop, to meet the uncertain dangers attendant on that terrible period of Indian history, the first parting under such circumstances was as agonizing as might indeed be expected. She—who had borne herself so bravely—nay, preached courage to her lover when called to meet adversity in a different form, now, with a woman's nature, when danger gathered round the head of the loved one, quivered like a reed before the tempest; requiring all the tender exhortations of the brave young soldier, to bear herself like a soldier's wife—a soldier's daughter—in a word, like his own high-minded—his noble Annie!—to enable her to support the terrible moments preceding his departure—to sustain her holy trust in the shield and buckler of the Faithful. It required indeed all the strength and fortitude of her natural character to keep her heart from utterly fainting when left amidst strangers, in a strange land; *how strange*, she never felt till now, when separated from him with whom every place was home.

She was left alone to muse by day and dream by night of all the dangers and accidents of woe to which her young hero was exposed—to listen with dread for every report of his regiment's movements—with anxious terror awaiting each rumour that reached the quarters in which she was often forced to remain.

But the gracious promise, that "as our day, so shall our strength be," is never found to fail God's children in their time of need, and great was the support accorded to the delicately reared English daughter, in this her time of sore neces-

sity; for she bore herself bravely through the increasing trials and perils of her state. In all her hardships the soul of Annie remained unshaken. To be near her husband was all she required, and though that post was ever one where danger must surround her—it was to her the home of peace and safety.

But the time at length arrived when Frank Mildmay earnestly entreated his Annie to leave him. An opportunity had presented itself of transporting her to a distant place of security and comfort, where she might give birth to her expected child.

But no! Annie earnestly implored that so it might not be—with affecting eloquence pleaded to be suffered to remain where he was—to follow if possible his steps. What comfort—what security could ease her agony of suspense and fear when far from him; and might not that very anguish of mind endanger her far more than any bodily trial to which she might be exposed under her present circumstances?

"Besides, Frank," she would say, "a soldier's wife you exhorted me to prove myself, when danger first darkened around us, and you would not now deprive me of the full power of enacting that character?"

And one more argument she added of a deeper, sadder nature—one, which as the words passed her pale lips, caused her to hide her face upon her husband's shoulder, whilst he, encircling her with his arms, promised that if possible they should not part.

"Frank," she had said, "think if one of us were to die—I, in my hour of trial which is so soon to come, and you in the dreadful, uncertain dangers surrounding you—how dreadful for both, to be out of the reach of one another—how appalling the thought that the loved one died alone!"

So Annie prevailed—and her child was born—in a besieged fort surrounded by danger, alarm and discomfort of every kind. But the young mother's peril over, smilingly shone her dark, rekindling eyes upon the father, permitted thus to welcome his little son into the world, almost as gaily laughed her silvery voice as it had sounded in her English home; and whilst her anxious husband bewailed the strange situation, and discomfort of every circumstance attending Annie and her infant, deploring that she should have passed through this trial without the much needed support and cheering presence of *their* dear mother—for so he loved to call her—Annie with considerate love would not breathe a hint, of how much indeed her spirit had at times yearned with that same natural desire—but with grateful tenderness soothed his kind solicitude with some such words as spoke Andromache to her Grecian hero.

"Father to me thou art, and mother dear,
And brother too—kind husband of my heart!"

The sun was sinking low on an Indian plain, when a mother's sweet voice was singing a soft lullaby to her babe in the fort not far distant. But a different scene did that plain afford some hours after, at dead of night, when the young wife was herself in prayer, lifting an inward voice of supplication to her God—imploping protection for her husband from the perils and dangers of that night; and even ere she arose from her knees, the distant sounds bursting upon her ears—although to such things she was but too well accustomed—were by their more than common terror freezing her blood with horror.

To describe the real terrors of the scene from which proceeded those awful sounds we will not attempt. Suffice it, that on the plain to which we have alluded, one of the most fatal and fearful engagements was enacted between our troops, and the barbarous tribes against whose incursions they were called upon to defend the ruling powers.

Victory was ours.—The barbarians were put to flight after a bloody slaughter on both sides. But what was victory to her who had to learn that it was bought with the life-blood of the one most loved! What cared she for victory—that pale, childlike girl, who with her dark hair wildly streaming round her, knelt by the side of her husband, stretched on the ground ghastly and faint from loss of blood—his hand convulsively grasped in hers—his dear eyes fixed with a strained, agonized gaze on her.

Yes, poor Frank Mildmay, after having distinguished himself for valour and gallantry, not to be equalled by any other on the field that day, had fallen at the head of his troop near the end of the engagement—and been borne back to meet the sight of his Annie in a state too painful for description.

And now indeed was the spirit of the soldier's wife called into active service—not only to witness—to gaze upon—but to tend and minister to that, of which the mere mention had been once sufficient, to turn her whole heart, and whiten her cheek with horror.

Those frightful wounds—those torturing agonies which Annie had for nights and days to behold *him* suffer, whose every throb found an echo in each fibre of her frame!

How would that fair hand have trembled one short year ago had it been employed but to stop the bleeding of a finger cut! But now for hours and days unshrinking—unwearied—none were allowed to supersede her in the office, of wiping with unremitting attention from her poor Frank's mouth the gore which impeded his utter-

ance or the power of swallowing—and oh! ecstasy how thrilling when the first tremulous murmur of "Better, dearest!" from his lips met her ear.

It is too painful to pursue minutely a theme so passing sad. The love—the devotion of an angel upon earth, has no power over the being whom death has marked for its victim. The days were numbered, in which Annie's prayers and watchings were permitted to stay her husband's spirit upon earth.

Upon her faithful bosom the young soldier's last sigh was shed—his last words were blessings on his Annie for her love—passing even the love of woman.

"Bless you, mine own!" he faltered, "I feel I need not ask you to forgive me for all that I have made you suffer—I know you have freely endured it all for the love you bear your poor Frank. Annie, be comforted; we part only for a brief space: I only go before you. Faithfully trusting in the God of pity, I commit you and my child to His care."

And Annie found herself with her fatherless babe, a widow in a strange land.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"I have seen thee once more, and thy voice had a sound
Like the music of bygone hours;
But 'twas sad in its tone, as the summer-wind's moan
When it sighs over faded flowers."

MISS MARY BRANDLING.

WHAT a tale was Annie's history, to shadow with its gloom that happy home in England! The uncertain knowledge of what was passing in India, where the fairest, dearest daughter was exiled, had been sufficient to fill her relations' hearts with anxious doubts and fearful dread on her account; but little did they divine the full extent of the storm of horrors and darkness, rolling over the head of that loved being, perhaps at the very moment when with tearful eyes and aching hearts they talked over the subject (so full of painful anxiety), their bright and beautiful Annie!

The news of the birth of her child had reached them by a few hurried lines from Frank Mildmay, with messages dictated by Annie herself, all tinged with the spirit of cheerfulness, with which the buoyant, hopeful heart of youth can gild even the darkest picture. When that letter reached the parents, cheering with its tenor their anxious trembling minds, the warm hand that penned it was cold in death—the brightness how darkened, in the young breast which had cast upon its lines such joyous light and hope!

Alas! the next despatch left them in fear and dread and horrible suspense; for

there, amidst the list of dangerously wounded, was the name of Frank Mildmay. An awful period of suspense ensued—and then another despatch told them the finale of the sad tale—that the wounds of the poor fellow had proved fatal.

Their feelings may be imagined—but it was at least a comfort to hear that his widow and child were under safe guardianship, and were shortly to take their departure from that fatal country.

And was it really thus with their poor child—the daughter reared with such tenderness, on such gay hopes, and brilliant expectations—whose delicate feet were, in the mother's prophetic vision, to tread no rougher path than the velvet carpet of some lordling's mansion?

And should the mother weep at this? Oh no, she need not if she really love her child—for we all too well know, the smoothest path is not the safest and best for the eternal interests of the creature.

But it is not only by trials such as these, through which it has been our task to lead the young Mildmays, that a mortal need pass, to gain a place amongst those "who out of weakness have been made strong"—who by faith and patience under chastisement have become the children of God.

The sorrows of the young widow would find an echo in many hearts who heard her moans, and bitter as was her grief—it had its own consolations.

But what solace reached the quiet, silent griefs—for griefs we know them to have been—which clouded the fate of the young wife whose position appeared to outward eye, all that the mother coveted as to worldly prosperity and well-doing. Not even her dearest friends knew the real nature and extent of poor Lena's sufferings, or could rightly appreciate their bitterness. For the heart who knew it, alone could impart it—and when the tongue spoke it not—the soul breathed it not—how could she meet with the sympathy of strangers? Selfish tyranny is only rendered perhaps the more oppressive, inasmuch that it is an evil which admits of no appeal—of no relief to be obtained, either by complaint or interference; and this trial was the power by which the patient soul of the young creature was doomed to be vexed; from the hour she had become the wife of Lionel Beauchamp. To attempt to describe how its influence became gradually heavier, or the victim to feel the corrosive power of that weary chain press more and more upon her, would be a difficult as well as painful task.

If such things were never heard of, or seen, but in the page of fiction, we might write and read them carelessly—or perhaps desire to spare the useless tear, the morbid pangs of pity they might excite;

but when we have known examples, in which some real and living soul has acted her sad, meek part, it becomes a more melancholy subject—one deeply painful to enter upon.

We will refrain, then, from the task of attempting to describe how, step by step—from the time she became the only object on which the power-loving souls of mother and son could exert their several instincts—Lena felt as it were her prison bars contracting around her, shutting out more and more all the hopes and joys, all the light of youth; rendering her life a daily narrowing sphere, of dull, rayless existence, in which two persons alone seemed to act or move—two beings who seemed to press with such a heavy weight upon her weary soul—her husband and his mother—a burden ever felt, ever present—darkening the light of Heaven, casting into a dim mist even her affections once so tenderly vivid and alive—bringing the dreadful feeling to her heart, that the power of enjoyment in those to whom her spirit was once so firmly knit, was dying within her.

Even her children were seen by Lena, but in this melancholy light, divided from her by those same prison bars of jealous selfishness and domineering tyranny.

We date a new era in Lena's existence, from the time when, after her sisters-in-law's abandonment of their home, she was brought under the full power of a new and harsher spirit than that which inspired the selfish treatment she received from her husband. Not that any ocular demonstration of that power was exercised upon her; none of the open acts of harshness and severity, under which her own daughters had been hardened and inured, were evidenced by her ladyship on the new subject over whose meek head her iron rule now passed—what need to use such weapons there?

Besides, it was far from her aim to destroy her lamb-like victim, whom such measures would indeed have crushed—at one fell blow. No—even her tyranny took the same show of gentleness—the same semblance of kindness; but no less did she make her power act—no less did Lena feel its arbitrary dominion over her whole being.

And how had Mr. Beauchamp suffered all this—admitted another into such open partnership with his sole right?

Because Lady Rachel could exercise the same despotic arbitration over her son—if she only touched the right spring—as over the weakest, the most yielding; and what spring but the right one did she touch, when the him of all she took in hand seemed but to aid in administering to his selfish gratification, and tend to the better subduing of his gentle wife—even render-

ing her more completely the passive object of his will and pleasure—drawing closer and closer round her the magic ring which was to make her more completely his own—severing her entirely from every influence save that which originated from himself.

They had taken her abroad for a year; it was a plan, he impressed upon her, formed chiefly for her pleasure and good—and most complacently did he appreciate his conjugal indulgence and consideration.

It was a change of scene and action, certainly, but not that for which her heart yearned and panted. The same oppressive, wearisome chain, was still around her in a foreign land as in her own country—the same chilling constraint hung over their movements in the fairest scenes and most interesting journeys.

Luxurious equipages—well-trained couriers, and expensive hotels, do not constitute the sole delights of travelling; how often did Lena sigh for the old green barouche, with its goodly freight of merry faces—above all, the presiding genius of her former travels—her own darling father, with his kind dear face, making everything so bright—every one so happy! Oh! those indeed had been “ways of pleasantness and their paths all peace!”

The present tour did not pass without a circumstance tending not a little to ruffle Mr. Beauchamp’s composure of mind on the subject of his lovely wife; particularly because, though a common accident, it seemed—by its coincidence with another of a similar nature—to present some little ground for his fancies to work upon.

The party, who had spent the winter in Italy, were travelling thence over its mountainous country, when, by an accident, the vehicle was overturned, and Mr. Beauchamp recovered from a stunning blow received in the fall, to behold his wife supported in the arms of a gentleman, who, with the most anxious solicitude, seemed bending over her nearly fainting, but uninjured form—her eyes were half closed, though on her lips trembled a smile.

The glance of the stranger, though full of reverence, was expressive of interest, which caused a severe pang of jealousy to the husband’s heart—so earnestly—so tenderly did he seem to gaze upon that sweet countenance—and still worse it was when the identity of the individual flashed upon his (Mr. Beauchamp’s) suspicious perception.

Yes, it was the same interloper who, on their wedding-day, had seen his bride in tears—who now dared to speak—to look thus at her.

“Lena, are you hurt?” Mr. Beauchamp inquired in a tone not of the gentlest—

and which made her struggle to overcome the alarm which had subdued her. Opening her eyes wide, she blushing disengaged herself from her supporter, answering in the negative.

Her husband somewhat rudely drew her arm within his own.

“Thank you, Mr. Sackville,” she then murmured with her simple grace, “you saved me, I think, from fainting.”

A flush, as bright as her own, rose on the young man’s pale cheek as he falteringly expressed pleasure at having been at hand to offer his services.

Lena glanced at her husband as if seeking from him some acknowledgment, on his part, of the attention she had received. But he only drew her abruptly on, calling out to the servants to hasten their proceedings in lifting up the carriage, and stood listening, in unmannerly silence, when Lena, hurt by his churlishness, spoke to her old friend with a kind and grateful smile—making some inquiries, in her sad, sweet voice, concerning the circumstances attending their unexpected meeting; in order to atone in a measure for her husband’s want of courtesy—and thus converting, for a brief space, Sackville’s existence into a state of blissful ecstasy;—an air of delight irradiated his countenance as he listened and replied. There was something in his manner which made her sigh. Her sigh was echoed by Sackville, who stooped to pick up the glove she had dropped at his feet. Ere he had raised himself, Mr. Beauchamp had hurried Lena into the carriage, and standing before the door till she was settled, closed it, and bade the postilions proceed.

Sackville’s first impulse was to return the glove; he had even made a movement to give it to a servant, but his heart failed him. He shrunk from confiding the delicate treasure into such rude hands, or, in truth, he had not courage to part with it at all—so, watching the vehicle till he could see it no longer, he folded the cherished glove in his satchel (for he was a pedestrian traveller) till it could be placed in a more fitting treasury.

Lena soon missing her glove, reported her loss to her husband with the view of stopping the carriage to seek for it; but Mr. Beauchamp’s temper being somewhat ruffled, he would suffer no such delay, saying, that “a glove was not worth the trouble of entailing upon them a second meeting with her friend,” concerning whom he began cross-questioning her with irritable curiosity.

But what had she more to tell, than that he had been her first—perhaps the favourite partner of her short London season? She had not even known that she had been beloved by him—still less that love had tinged her own young heart; for she was not

then aware what love was—and had not learnt the lesson since—so Mr. Beauchamp, who could not scold her for nearly fainting and requiring support, or for exchanging a few kind words and smiles with an old acquaintance, was forced to endure in silence the unpleasant feelings the adventure had excited in his mind—and was haunted for many a day with the tormenting vision of his Lena like a fair drooping lily supported in the young stranger's arms—a vision not suffered quite to die away—for during their stay on the Continent the Beauchamps fell in more than once with Frederick Sackville, who seemed to be taking the same route as themselves. No opportunity was however allowed for any communication taking place between Lena and the young man, and perhaps it was as well that so it was.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"O, tiger's heart, wrapp'd in a woman's hide.

Women are soft, mild, pitiful and flexible."

Thou stern, obdurate, flinty, rough, remorseless.

SHAKESPEARE.

IN May a son and heir was born to the house of Beauchamp, which survived its birth not many hours, to the bitter disappointment of the father, who seemed scarcely able to comprehend being thus baffled in the possession of a son—or able to forgive the injury perpetrated upon him by its loss. Nothing could induce him to believe that it might not have been saved, but for unpardonable neglect on some one's part—some second cause—and knew not on whom to lay the blame—doctor, nurse, or mother.

"My good sir," said the physician, a sensible, plain-spoken man, out of patience at last with his complaints on the subject, "no man on earth can expect to have everything as if he had but to speak the word and it was as he pleased; we cannot work miracles even for you—Let it be enough that in taking the child, the Almighty has pleased to spare the mother. You are not the first man who has lost an heir; so, sir, pray bear the disappointment like a Christian, and if you wish to entertain a hope of another son, take care of your wife, she is a delicate plant."

"Take care of her, Doctor!—Good Heavens! have you seen anything to lead you to entertain a doubt that sufficient care is bestowed upon her—does not my mother direct every movement in the sick room? am I absent from it for ten minutes together—"

"Gently, gently, my dear sir," the doctor replied; "I did not mean to insinuate anything of that sort—no, rather I would

tell you to keep in mind that there is such a thing as too much care—do not kill your fair lady with kindness—give her breathing time—and perfect quiet of mind."

"But what makes you say she is a delicate plant?—is she not recovering rapidly? have you not even named an early day for her removal to the sea-side?"

"Yes, sir, yes—all that's very true—I only mean that she is not naturally a strong person, and caution is always needed in those cases."

"For," thought the medical man, "I have no time to waste in trying to convince that obstinate, tiresome mule, and there is nothing to be done—no serious symptom to take hold of in her case; but that something is wrong about that lovely woman is but too evident."

Six months after the departure for the sea-side, orders were again given for the Belgrave Square house, to be in readiness for the occupation of the family, and the party arrived soon after from the Towers.

It happened that General Cameron was shortly after in town, having come with his boy Cecil, who had—through the interest of the Duke—obtained a nomination to the Charter House. Inquiring at the door in Belgrave Square if any intelligence of the family had been lately received, the General was told that the family were even then in the house. He asked immediately for Mrs. Beauchamp—whether she were at home; and accustomed to the mysterious, hesitating uncertainty with which such demands were ever received by the Beauchamps' servants, he was not much surprised, when the man to whom he was referred by the porter, hesitated and said he did not know whether Mrs. Beauchamp could admit any one; she had not received company—only seen Doctor L—since her arrival in town.

"But of course," interrupted the General in his fine military tone and manner of irresistible command, "Mrs. Beauchamp will see me."

And in he marched with Cecil by his side, and was ushered into a library by his conductor, who then departed to give intelligence of his presence.

A few minutes after, the door was thrown open, admitting one with whom the General had not held any intercourse since his visit to the Towers some three years ago—the Lady Rachel Beauchamp! With the most formal and cold civility, she courtesied to the General as if to a stranger, the object of whose visit she had yet to learn.

"My daughter—I have just learned that she has arrived in town," he said, with less composed courtesy than characterized

her Ladyship's salutation—"I shall be glad to have this opportunity of seeing her, though my stay is somewhat short. Is she now visible?" he continued, glancing impatiently towards the door, and showing himself not inclined to brook any dallying or delay being interposed between himself and the object of his visit.

"Mrs. Beauchamp has been slightly indisposed of late," was Lady Rachel's answer, with the same courtesy of demeanour; "and the purpose of our visit to London is medical advice—we trust by that means to set her to rights; and quiet and freedom from any prejudicial excitement being necessary for the furtherance of that purpose, renders it expedient that we should exclude all visitors from her apartments."

"Visitors! but, good God, madam, her own father you surely cannot include in that list?"

Even Lady Rachel was not proof against the glow of indignation and agitation with which this ejaculation was accompanied, and in a tone somewhat conciliatory, replied—

"Lionel is so very particular and nervous on his wife's account, that even you, General, are as likely to be excluded as any other individual; indeed the unexpected visit of one so nearly connected, must naturally be supposed more likely to excite the feelings of Mrs. Beauchamp than that of one indifferent to her."

"Is she then so very ill?" inquired the General in a tone of deep anxiety, forgetting every other consideration in his alarm.

"By no means," was the cold reply; "you overreach my meaning, General—a diminution of power, and a slight increase of the languor which is natural to her constitution, is the extent of her ailments. First-rate medical attendance, and extreme care, is all she requires for her perfect re-establishment to health—I think," she continued with a haughty sneer, "Mrs. Beauchamp's friends may be perfectly satisfied, that the highest lady in the land could not have more attendance or luxurious comfort, than is lavished with so unsparring a hand upon *your daughter*."

"I do not doubt it," said the General hurriedly; "but so unnatural a proceeding as that of preventing a daughter from holding any intercourse with her father or near relations, can serve—or answer no good purpose under Heaven. No! rather I am certain the plan to cure her and make her strong in body and spirit, would be to give her up to her mother to cheer and nurse her for a time."

The angry fire began to rise in Lady Rachel's eyes as she tossed back her head at this bold assertion, but the General continued—

"Poor dear girl! she was ever the most

clinging, attached little creature—never quite happy when away from her mother; and to be so entirely cut off from us all as she has been since her marriage, is of itself sufficient to kill her; and it is my opinion," continued the General, vehemently, "that she has never been half well or happy since."

"Indeed, sir!" her ladyship exclaimed.—"Your daughter then has endured these killing privations with the most exemplary patience, for from *her* we have had no complaints—no reason to suspect any such depths of feeling on the subject. Perhaps," she added, with supercilious *hauteur*, "the remembrance, unretained it would seem by her parents—of all that a portionless bride owes of gratitude to her husband, is sufficient to restrain any such demonstrations of unwarranted discontent on her part."

"Gratitude, indeed!" murmured the General, cordially wishing that the individual before him bore not the name of woman. But that fact being of itself sufficient to preserve him within the bounds of gentlemanly forbearance, curbing with some difficulty any demonstration of resentment at this last sally, he stated with quiet dignity, that as his purpose had been to see his daughter, he would intrude no longer on Lady Rachel; if he were to see Mrs. Beauchamp he requested to be shown immediately to her apartment.

"With all my heart, General; it cannot be any object of mine to prevent your doing so, if it be still your determination after what I have informed you of my son's sentiments on the subject."

"Where is your son, madam? Why the—why, in the name of goodness," exclaimed the General, checking himself, "does he not come and let me talk it out with him—why not himself inform me of the meaning of all this?—I have borne it too quietly all along."

"My son is not at home at this moment, and after the strict injunctions he left as to his wife's perfect freedom from disturbance of any kind, none of her attendants would like to incur the responsibility of having suffered them to be disobeyed. But if you, sir, choose, in his absence, to command it, of course—"

"Very well," said the General, interrupting her by rising with a flushed face, but cool steadiness of purpose in his countenance. "Of course I feel little inclined to force myself under such circumstances even into my daughter's presence. I shall go and see the doctor, and ascertain from him whether it is such a life or death case, that his patient should be even debarred from the sight of her own father. Come, Cecil! Why, where's the boy?" the General exclaimed, as having taken up his hat and stick, he looked round for his

young son, whose presence he had almost forgotten in the agitation of the scene. But Cecil, who, before Lady Rachel's entrance, had travelled to a distant end of the room to examine some books of prints on the table, had now totally disappeared from sight—so the General, bowing, and receiving in return a courtesy of lower and more portentous ceremony than that with which Lady Rachel had received him, left the room, expecting to find the boy without in the vestibule. But he had to make some inquiries of the servants and call his son's name several times ere he appeared, bounding towards his father, who, full of other thoughts, questioned him not on his truancy, but left the house immediately.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"How my heart
After long desolation, now unfolds
Unto this new delight, to kiss thy head,
Thou dearest, dearest one of all on earth,

* * * * *
oh, my brother!"
MRS. HEMANS.

CECIL, the pretty family favourite of former days, now a fine boy of eleven—his childish beauty little impaired by change of costume—had made no such fruitless visit to the house, from which his father was retreating so vexed and grieved in spirit. His busy eye having been attracted, almost immediately after Lady Rachel's entrance, by a picture through the half-open door of a room into which the library led, the boy stepped in for a nearer examination of the "fine fellow" in the shape of a Newfoundland the painting represented.

It was a sort of vestibule in which he found himself—the walls lined with pictures—and having travelled—whilst inspecting them—down the whole length of the apartment, he found himself near another door that stood ajar. With boyish curiosity he pushed it open to ascertain what was to be seen.

It was the dining-room, and unabashed by the sight of various footmen laying the cloth on a small round table in the midst of it, he reconnoitred at his pleasure the spacious apartment, with the magnificent plate on the side-board—and then the privileged youngest son, never having been as yet imbued with any idea of shame-facedness, or fear of the frown of mankind high or low, rich or poor, did not feel any scruple as to extending his voyage of discovery in the same way as he had been wont to do in the Duke's mansion, and those of other friends—trusting to his organ of locality to bring him back to his starting-point without much difficulty.

At length, however, by some wrong turn he found himself at fault.

"Holloa!" he cried, as he heard footsteps and voices, and saw nurses and children ascending a staircase, at the foot of which he found himself. He followed them—either prompted by an uncle's instinct of affection, or a desire to make inquiries concerning his route.

But the fine lady nurse—coldly glancing back at the sound of the unceremonious appeal—slackened not in her progress, and had shut the door of the passage, into which she disappeared, ere he could reach the top. He was about again to descend when he heard a kind voice saying—

"That is the room, Master Cecil—yes, you can go in;" and a respectable-looking elderly woman, whose face he thought he remembered, pointed to a door just before him. The boy, bewildered by his wanderings, with no very clear idea of what was to happen next, proceeded to obey her direction, opening the door, but less cavalierly than he had thrown open the others; for even as he turned the lock, a murmuring from within told him it was occupied—and he would have turned back, had not his directress still stood watching him, saying that he was not to be afraid—so he was ashamed to retreat, and finally entered.

The elegant aspect of the apartment, its perfumed atmosphere, and more than all, the first *coup d'œil* of a beautiful lady occupied in working—evidently in an invalid state reclining on a satin sofa—impressed the young intruder with a quail of awe and timidity. He stood irresolute, particularly as the lady did not at first perceive him. But her companion, an elderly, jaundiced-visaged personage, looked up from a book, which she seemed to be reading aloud, in a tone of voice not very likely to soothe by its mellifluous notes the nerves of an invalid.

The cessation of her voice, and a slight movement, directed her languid listener's attention towards the unknown visitor. The very fair lady turned her large melancholy eyes inquiringly upon the boy—for a moment gazed in amazed uncertainty—half rose—murmured a few words with an earnest, uncertain expression, then opened wide her arms, crying, "My Cecil!" and at the same moment her young brother sprang forward, recognising by the feeling which rose in his heart, his sister Lena, whom he had not beheld since her wedding-day, but whom he had ever loved so dearly.

"Cecil, my own darling Cecil, how did you come here?" the sister inquired amidst caresses of such feeling and tenderness that they called tears to the boy's eyes also.

"Why, Cecil," she continued, holding

him from her, and gazing upon him, "has become such a man since I last saw him!—but here is still the same merry face—and would you have known me, dearest? I fear not—you were such a little boy when you saw me last—it is so very long ago."

"Oh no, I was not so very little, Lena; I can remember only four years ago."

"Can you?" she answered, smiling sadly. "Only four years! it is a long, long time, Cecil, very long to me. But you have not forgotten Lena—you used to be so fond of her—and such a pet of hers you were, dear boy—do you remember?"—tears choked her utterance.

"Oh, yes, I remember," Cecil answered, cheerily. "You taught me to read, and all that, and had just begun me with Latin when you married."

"Had I? how clever I must have been!" the sister answered with a playful smile. "I have forgotten all my Latin now, I fear—but tell me, darling boy, where you have come from—and who is with you?" she now with a trembling earnestness inquired.

"Oh, I came from Ireland to go to the Charter House. Papa brought me over."

"And is he in London—is he here?" Lena asked, pale with eagerness.

"Oh, yes, I left him down stairs speaking to Lady Rachel Beauchamp."

"And is he not coming up to see me?" she asked, much agitated.

"Yes, I suppose so. I went out of the room to look about me a little, and lost my way; or rather," he added, laughing, "found my way up here to you. What a beautiful house this is of yours, Lena!" he continued, looking around him admiringly, "larger and finer than the Duke's, I think."

"Yes, darling!" his sister answered, with a kind, but somewhat absent smile; for she was listening with thrilling, nervous expectation, for her father's approach.

"And who is that?" whispered the boy, looking critically at her companion, who had now taken up a piece of work on which she was employed for Lady Rachel; and who in the early stage of the interview had actually been obliged to take off her spectacles to wipe from her eyes the tears which had moistened them.

Lena answered to her inquisitive brother's demand, that it was Miss Ricketts.

"Oh, indeed!" he said, glancing as if upon a monster. "That horrid woman!" he murmured to himself.

Poor Miss Ricketts—to whom looks of disgust were no novelties—on perceiving she had engaged the young gentleman's attention, ventured to address him, and inquired in her unpleasing voice, "If Miss Agnes, or rather Mrs. Gerald Cameron were well?"

"Quite well, thank you, I believe," said the boy, quickly, and then turned away to the more pleasing object presented by the sister with whom he had been reunited, and who appeared to him in the pretty muslin wrapper, which enveloped her delicate form, more lovely than Annie, Janet, or even his mother; though he knew not why he felt more sad than glad as he looked upon her, and sat by her side watching the varying hues quickly chasing one another on her pale cheeks, whilst she, pressing his hand within her own, was now looking proudly upon him, speaking words of tenderness—now lifting her eyes, listening with anxious longing for her father's presence. But soon the General's voice had faintly reached his little son's ears, and the groom of the chambers at the same time knocking at the door asked whether Master Cameron was there.

Cecil started up to go.

"But is he not coming to me?" exclaimed poor Lena, in a plaintive tone of despair. "Oh! Cecil, dear, do not go!" and she retained his hand, as if with him all hope would depart.

But the boy knew if his father wished to leave the house he would be impatient if he did not join him directly—for he was not fond of being kept waiting—so Cecil said he must go.

"But I will tell papa, dear Lena, that you want to see him."

Lena released his hand with sad reluctance. He kissed her affectionately and ran off.

"Oh why—why has he gone without seeing me?" cried poor Lena, as the sound of the closing street door smote upon her ear, and she turned her piteous face towards Miss Ricketts, in sorrowful appeal.

But Miss Ricketts only asked her if she would not take some of her nervous mixture.

Lady Rachel shortly after entered, and with unsuspecting composure asked her "how she found herself?"

But her daughter-in-law for all answer, murmured her father's name, asking with tearful agitation if he had not been in the house.

"Yes! I have had a visit from the General," was her ladyship's answer; "he came to inquire after your health."

"But why might I not see him? he could not have been so near me without wishing to see me," was Lena's plaintive demand.

"However much your father might have desired to do so," her ladyship replied, "being informed of Lionel's express command, that the doctor's orders should be implicitly obeyed with respect to your perfect quiet and freedom from excitement, the General was not so falsely af-

fectionate as to press for an interview. Pray, how came you to be so unnecessarily informed of your father's visit?"

"I have seen my brother!" she murmured, the large tears trickling down her cheeks.

"Ah! that is it! see what it has cost you—how prejudicial such excitements are to your nerves!"

"But when am I to see papa—when will he come again? Ah, Lady Rachel, it is so very long since I saw him."

"One year, I believe—you have been permitted more intercourse with your family, than often falls to the lot of married women. By this time, Mrs. Beauchamp," Lady Rachel continued, in a tone of ill-assumed gentleness, "you should have become accustomed to your situation, and have courage to overcome these childish agitations on such occasions."

"Accustomed! never—never!" the poor young creature murmured, clasping her hands and turning away, with a blank look of despair on her countenance—unequal to combating the point with Lady Rachel even if she had felt the courage to do so.

Lena saw her father, however, before he left town, which was very shortly after; as it may be supposed, the General would not depart without having seen his child. He had at first carried out his point of seeing the distinguished practitioner under whose treatment his daughter was placed, and had received from him all the information he could, or was inclined to give, on the state of his patient's health.

But that was of no very clear or satisfactory a nature—something there was to justify a degree of alarm, but yet of no such serious nature as to cause the apprehension of any real danger—the lungs all right, &c., &c.

In short, the present cause of anxiety seemed to Doctor I——— but an advanced stage of those symptoms which had appeared to him to require so much care after Mrs. Beauchamp's last confinement the preceding May, and which he trusted might be counteracted.—It was necessary that the state of her nerves should be attended to, but as a matter of course the society of her relations could be of no injury—nay, rather beneficial to the lady—and even Lena's jealous guardians felt it impossible to carry out so unnatural and unwarrantable a measure as that of excluding a father from a passing visit to his daughter, however much they might have felt inclined so to do. Mr. Beauchamp therefore ordered the General to be admitted, and receiving him with as much parade and form as possible—making the act appear a favour of no

small magnitude—conducted him to Lena's apartment.

It was an affecting interview—though the presence of Mr. Beauchamp, who only left them for a very few minutes, threw a constraint over any particular manifestation of feeling. The father sat and gazed on his child, whilst he endeavoured to speak as cheerfully as possible, striving to reassure his heart that it was no fatal beauty which struck him with its brilliancy, in lieu of the sickly signs he had feared to witness in her face; and it was touching to watch the mute ecstasy with which the daughter seemed to breathe in his presence, which seemed to lull into confidence and rest all painful emotions and sad thoughts. They spoke indeed of the perils and dangers to which poor Annie was exposed, and Lena asked question after question concerning the dear ones at home. But she seemed strengthened by her present delight into a more cheerful feeling on all subjects;—perhaps because her father told her that, his appointment expiring in the spring, they would all return to England; and it cheered her to think, as she said, that at least the sea would no longer divide them—evidently having no thought that a more impassable gulph might ere then have interposed its barrier between their intercourse.

Before the General finally departed, Lena sent for a jewel-case, and presented him with presents for her sisters—"And Agnes, too," she said, lowering her voice that she might not offend her husband's ears by the mention of his unforgiven sister. To her mother she sent a book, saying she knew she would prize it from its being a great favourite of hers, and having pencil marks in it at all her favourite passages.

"And, father, will you not accept some little keepsake?" Lena said, as she placed on his finger a ring of some value—"Oh, do not say no!" she added, as he shook his head almost impatiently, and rose in preparation to depart—for he began to feel an emotion oppress his heart, which made him painfully nervous.

"God bless you, my darling child! keep yourself well and happy for my sake. In May, I trust, we shall meet again."

"I trust you think your daughter better in looks and spirits than my mother's account led you to suppose," Mr. Beauchamp said, as he conducted the General from his wife's presence, having, during the interview, appeared—to judge from his indulgent endurance of its length—to have put some restraint upon his natural selfishness. He had even forwarded his wife's wishes with regard to the presents to her family, by assisting her in their selection. But when removed from her

presence, the *old man* in him seemed to revive. "I own," he added, "that she does not always look as you have seen her just now; but the doctors are much more in favour of the more natural signs of pallor and languor consequent on a slight derangement of her system, than the false appearance of brilliancy of complexion which excitement produces, and that is the chief danger to guard against."

The General felt too much at this moment for energy to enter into any discussion; he only earnestly entreated that every intelligence concerning his daughter might be transmitted to his family, even were it only a few lines from her maid. Mr. Beauchamp answered, coldly, that there would be no need to have recourse to such a measure; every necessary information should certainly be conveyed through the proper channel; he hoped, however, there would be no great occasion for frequent bulletins. It was his purpose to take Lena to Brighton, directly, as the most bracing air that could be found, the doctors seemed to think most expedient for her perfect recovery.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

* * * "The tall stalk was broken,
The leaf pale, and flower faded,—hung her head,
Just like a lily trodden under foot,
That lives and still is fair among the moss,
But daily dimmer in its withering."
WILSON'S "Dream of the Highlands."

Spring came, bringing with it the tidings to England, of the death of poor Frank Mildmay, which hastened the Camerons in their return to England, to prepare a home for their widowed daughter.

Yet they had another cause, as deeply sad—as agonizingly sorrowful, to propel their movements. That a heavy weight of anxiety was added to the parents' hearts, their care-worn, anxious countenances could testify.

What was this great grief impending? Alas! pass but through one of London's grandest squares, and the cause might be guessed, for the carefully spread straw before one mansion, its muffled knocker, and the frequent sight of waiting carriages of physicians, told a sad tale.

Shortly after these ominous signs made themselves manifest, the carriage of the Duchess of Stratheden had driven to the door, and having been told that Lady Rachel Beauchamp was at home, her Grace ordered the steps to be let down, and with the firm, determined dignity she so well knew how to assume, entered the house into which—though she had called constantly at the door—she had not yet been admitted, since the family's arrival from Brighton, a month before.

"Lady Rachel," she said, on being shown into the presence of her Ladyship, "I trust I may be permitted to visit Mrs. Beauchamp, having brought a certificate to that effect from good authority;" and she showed a note from Doctor L—— saying that he saw no reason against the Duchess of Stratheden's visiting Mrs. Beauchamp in her sick-room.

Lady Rachel's brow knit as she cast her eye over it, saying that she was not aware that her Grace's desire to see her daughter-in-law had been of so urgent a nature; Mrs. Beauchamp's health not being in a state to admit of her receiving visitors.

"The fact of her mother being my earliest and dearest friend, and the strong interest I am known to take in all her family, would alone have been enough to make me desirous of seeing Lena—but her parents have repeatedly urged me to give them more satisfactory information regarding the state of their daughter's health than they have been enabled to gain from more direct channels."

"There has been nothing so very alarming in their daughter's condition to call for such frequent communications on the subject," Lady Rachel replied.

"I am rejoiced to hear you say so," the Duchess replied; "but the signs of sickness—the straw—the muffled knocker—what do they all portend?"

"Nervous—nervous—nothing but her nerves, which call for such precautions!" said Lady Rachel, with evident efforts to make her statement appear her true sentiments on the subject. "But you shall see her as you desire."

And she rang the bell desiring that Mr. Beauchamp might be informed that the Duchess of Stratheden had called to visit Mrs. Beauchamp.

After a few minutes' delay, the servant reappeared to say that Mrs. Beauchamp would be happy to see her Grace.

Lady Rachel accordingly escorted her noble visiter through a splendid suite of apartments appertaining to her daughter-in-law's sole use—private drawing-room, boudoir, dressing-room! with an air of haughty complacency, with conscious triumph, as to the impression which must have been made even upon the Duchess, as to the goodly lot which had fallen to the General's portionless daughter—and throwing open the last door, ushered her with pompous ceremony into the large sleeping apartment, where upon a couch at its furthest extremity reclined that favoured individual.

But the Duchess, as she approached, saw only the fair, gentle creature, whom to behold was to love, changed, however, as a flower is changed by some ungenial blight.

Perhaps it was the dead white of the habiliments she wore, which gave her an

appearance so fearfully frail, as she sat up to receive her friend—her complexion so beautifully transparent.

"It is very kind of you to come and see me, dear Duchess," she murmured gratefully, throwing her arms round the neck of her mother's friend with all the gentle fervour so natural to her.

"Dear child, I have been wishing to come ever since my arrival in town."

"Have you, indeed?" Lena said, in a tone of surprise; "for I should have so much rejoiced to see you. I often wished you would come; but they told me," she continued, lowering her voice, glancing her eye around, and seeing Lady Rachel had retired—"they told me all who asked to be admitted I should see."

"And could you for a moment have imagined that I should not ask and wish to see you, dearest Lena?"

"Ah, I thought you would if you knew—but London is so gay now—you must have so much to do—and to occupy your thoughts."

"Dear Lena, not so much as to make me forget you—no, believe me, you are one of my chief thoughts. But you must not tire yourself," she added, perceiving that the voice of the invalid became faint, and a hectic flush of weakness overspread her face. "Lie down, and I will sit here!" And the Duchess took her place on a large chair which stood near, and which from the appearance of the table close to it, covered with books and papers, showed that it had just been vacated.

"It is very pleasant to see you, dear Duchess," Lena faintly said, "it reminds me of Mamma; have you heard from her lately?"

"Yes, dearest, very lately—they all hope to come to England early next month."

"Do they, indeed?" she exclaimed, her face brightening up with a sudden glow.

"You will like to have your mother with you now you are not well," continued the Duchess.

"Oh yes!" the invalid answered with a sigh, and in a subdued voice, which seemed to say that she feared to offend some one by the assertion—and the Duchess guessed they were not alone—at least, that the husband was in the adjoining room, the door of which was not far distant from where they sat.

"But I have been a long time ill," Lena continued.

"I was in hopes Brighton would have done you good," the Duchess remarked.

"It did at first, but I think the air became almost too bracing, and that it exhausted me; so the doctors advised me to return to town, and I have been in bed nearly ever since."

"And you feel weak doubtless?"

"Yes, weak, and the noise without, and the knocks, at first made me feel restless and uncomfortable—but lately every sound seems to have become so deadened and muffled—it gives me quite a pleasant, drowsy sensation. The music of the organs is so soothing, I am quite sorry that they send them away for fear of their disturbing me. The nights seem very long and weary, but the greatest part of the day I lie so dreamily, unconscious almost of reality."

The Duchess was in tears.

"Oh, dear friend," she continued, with a sweet smile, seeing this emotion, "it is a very happy state, I assure you—quite like a blissful dream—such sweet faces all around—so many dear ones with me."

"It is the weakness of your state," the Duchess murmured, "you are not left much alone, are you?"

"Oh no! Lionel sits by me almost all the day," she answered quietly, "he is very kind; I fear he will make himself ill, for he scarcely ever leaves my side—and Lady Rachel is often with me—but I am not allowed to talk much—and there are many many hours—for dreams."

"And I must not allow you to talk to me much," the Duchess said, the sound of an impatient cough in the next room, giving her a hint, that she must terminate her visit. "And here is Lady Rachel come to take me away," she added, as her ladyship sailed in.

"You will come again," Lena said, clasping with her thin hands that of the Duchess. "Yes, yes, pray do, and you will tell them when you write, how much I should like to see them—how I long for the time—how I dream of it. But they must not be hurried, either, on my account—it may be inconvenient," she said, with the same humble disregard of self which had always characterized her earliest youth. "And Annie, how anxious they must be about her! When will they hear again? Lionel has not told me lately of the movements of her husband's regiment."

Lena evidently had not been informed of the sad news which had reached England, so the Duchess of course was silent on the subject.

"Lady Rachel, is she not worse than you gave me reason to suppose—is she not very ill, poor young creature?" said her Grace, having been conducted back with the same parade through the suite of apartments as far as the concluding reception room, where they paused, and then the Duchess turned her mild eyes suffused with tears upon her conductress.

"Ill, certainly!" Lady Rachel replied in a hard, callous tone, contrasting strongly with that of her companion, "but not worse, I hope, than others have been before her, and who have recovered—and

who—may I presume to ask—can command more comfort and luxury during an illness? who ever inhabited a more splendid suite of apartments? her Majesty herself cannot be better lodged, I should imagine."

"Alas, alas, Lady Rachel!" the Duchess, no longer able to repress her feelings, exclaimed. "It is all, doubtless, as you say, yet are they not these things which often make a death-bed terrible? Not to her, sweet angel! would I apply those words in their original sense, but—your ladyship must forgive me if I speak plainly, and say,—if they have been the means of depriving poor Lena, in her weakness and sickness, of the care and consolation the presence of a mother alone can afford—if they have deprived her of the comfort of calling her family around her—are not all these outward signs of prosperity—these luxuries and comforts likely to plant a sting even in her pillow of down?"

"Has Mrs. Beauchamp then complained to your Grace?" inquired Lady Rachel in a much offended tone.

"No, sweet soul! she is, I think, beyond complaint—almost as one not very long for this world," the Duchess, much affected, answered.

"The medical attendants have given us no reason to entertain any such distressing ideas," answered her ladyship.

"Lady Rachel," said the Duchess, drying her weeping eyes, "if the Camerons were in London would they be allowed free access to their daughter? for if so, I would urge them to hasten their departure from Ireland. At any rate, I think they ought—"

"I see no necessity for any such serious and immediate step," Lady Rachel interrupted with some tartness, "when any such course appears expedient, your Grace may be assured that all will be done by my son that propriety demands—ho, of course, will not allow any one to rob him of his rightful privileges—by the claims of others on his wife, to whom I am sure he makes the most devoted nurse ever woman possessed."

The Duchess departed with a sad heart.

A week and then another passed, and still within the sick chamber the same still life went on. The patient invalid continued to dream away her days as if in a trance, to pass her nights in pain and restlessness, as meekly endured.

And the same watcher kept his post by her side, night and day, for only relaxation stretching himself on a sofa in the next room, or resting his head for a few minutes' slumber on her couch. No other hand lifted a cup to her lips—no other hand adjusted her pillow.

And it was her husband, this never-

wearying attendant. Did it not seem that from perfect love this devotion could alone have sprung? Yet none in after days spoke of the *love* that cheered; but many of the selfishness which blighted his fading lily.

"Judge not, that ye be not judged!" should be the ever remembered words, to check the too denouncing sentence of our fellow men; yet who is not justified in refusing the title of *perfect love* to him who shut his heart against the too well understood yearnings of the drooping flower—for whose revival he was waiting and watching with such anxious agony—and still withheld from her the cup of cold water for which she thirsted like the hart for the water brooks—the presence of those who had from her earliest infancy been the light and sunshine to her wearied spirit—and for whom, now that the shadows of the grave began to overshadow her with their darkness, she pined silently—secretly. Yes! had not the husband himself directed, that till real and immediate danger was apprehended, no summons should be despatched—no officious intruder be allowed to supersede him in his offices in the sick chamber of his wife?

"Lionel," the meek sufferer timidly murmured one day, as her husband, having just lifted the medicine to her pale lips, stood holding her pulse, his anxious eyes fixed upon her face, "I was thinking—wishing, just now—you will perhaps think it an inconsiderate desire—for it is—nay, do not turn away—I am not going to speak of *Ireland*," she continued, with a smothered sigh—"but I am so—so ill—I should like to have some clergyman to read and talk to me—your brother Ralph—good, kind Ralph!—to one in my situation how comforting—how strengthening! Oh! Lionel! if I could but have him to pray with me!"

"Good God, Lena!" interposed her husband, in a tone of mingled anguish and reproach, "what a miserable fancy, indeed! Am I not always at your service, to read and pray with you if you desire it?—why should you wish for Ralph now?"

"Now! dear Lionel! when I am dying, for so the doctors' looks seem to say—oh! can you not understand me!"

"No, Lena! for even if your cruel words were true—" and he turned away, either in sorrow or in anger; his poor wife scarcely knew whether she had grieved or offended him, and she too averted her face, and strove not to weep.

No! how could her husband understand her spiritual desire—he who was priest—yea, even *God* to himself—what should or could she desire, so he thought, but that *same self*, even to the ministering of comfort to her soul?

Another evening came, when the dressing-room leading to the sick-chamber was the scene of grave and sorrowful faces, and one countenance of agonized despair. Mr. Beauchamp sat, his hand pressed to his forehead, with pale and haggard countenance, whilst Lady Rachel—a trifle paler perhaps—but with the same cold, hard expression on her countenance, stood conversing with the doctors, who spoke in low, ominous tones, and cast significant glances towards the room they had a few minutes before quitted.

Soon the afflicted man had re-entered that apartment—there all was serene and peaceful—a weeping maid gave place to him by the side of the couch over which she had been bending, and withdrew. He looked on Lena, whose face was irradiated with a heavenly smile, and despair was gnawing at his heart.

"Thank you, Lionel; you have made me so happy!"

"Happy!" he gasped almost angrily. "How—why?"

"You have sent for *them*, have you not?—they told me so—oh Lionel, to see them again!" and her lips quivered with emotion.

"Sent for *them*! and she can rejoice, when that very fact only speaks my hopeless misery; and if they come and surround her, and in her last moments hide her from my sight!—By Heaven! what have I done to deserve this blow, to lose her to whom for nearly five years I have devoted my every thought and care?—all hope—all pride in life! oh wretched that I am!"

And with these reflections the proud man sank down, in his abject misery, by the sufferer's side.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"Pale, broken flower! what art can now recover thee?"

Torn from the stem that fed thy rosy breath,—
In vain the sunbeams seek to warm thy faded cheek.
The dews of heaven, that once like balm fell over thee

Now are but tears to weep thy early death."

MOORE.

Two young men, strangers to each other, met at the door of the Belgrave Square Mansion late one night.

One of them had already rung the bell gently; the other, for some time before, might have been seen pacing to and fro on the opposite side, his countenance pale and anxious, his eyes fixed upon a window, the sash of which was raised; a light was glimmering through the closed curtains. He had stepped across, and stood also in expectation of the door opening.

A porter of solemn and mysterious coun-

tenance appeared, and the first comer demanded anxiously for Mrs. Beauchamp; the other young man bending forward as if his very life depended on the answer. The answer having been given in a subdued voice, with an ominous shake of the head, the inquirer with an exclamation of deep concern whispered a few more questions, and turned to depart.

The porter seeing that the second person did not come forward, judging him to be the companion of his master's brother, Mr. Alfred Beauchamp—for he it was who had spoken to him—closed and chained the door as slowly and cautiously as he had opened it.

Alfred Beauchamp glanced round as he was departing, remembering the anxious wretched expression of the countenance he had seen as he stood at the door; he now perceived the same person leaning against the railings of the house, and he fancied he heard a groan. He retraced his steps, and in a kind voice said—

"Come, sir! let me offer you my arm and company home. It is not good for one to be alone under such sad circumstances, and I can assure you, though I have only seen her once, I feel almost as deeply as if I had known that sweet young creature more intimately."

The young man had looked up suddenly on being thus addressed, and strove to assume an air of cold dignity; but the kind, feeling words and manner melted him again; murmuring some indistinct syllables, he bowed hastily with some embarrassment, but still lingered as if averse to accepting the kindly intended offer.

"A brother I conclude!" Alfred Beauchamp thought; as with a look and tone of sympathy he continued to offer his services.

The unhappy Sackville shook his head, and turned away impatiently.

"Humph!" inwardly ejaculated the other, "a lover then!"

His sympathy did not decrease in consequence of this new suggestion, but putting his arm with sailor-like cavaliness within Sackville's, he drew him on.

"Yes, she was as fair and charming a creature as ever I beheld," Beauchamp continued—not the best chosen speech to make, perhaps, if desirous of enacting the comforter; but the words flowed spontaneously from his lips.

"She was indeed!" sighed Sackville, turning round at the same moment as if unconsciously; and the young men found themselves pacing up and down before that same house in the mutual confidence as of a long acquaintanceship.

Sackville was only inclined for silence; however, he listened to his companion's information of his being on the eve of sailing for the Cape, and that he had been

desirous of obtaining the latest news of his poor sister-in-law. Sackville, as if he were also called upon to give some account of himself in return, languidly said that an aunt of his was an old and attached friend of the Cameron-family.

"And do you mean to say that none of her own family are allowed to be with her, that the—Zounds! I forget he is my brother—that he carries his selfish tyranny to such a pitch?"

"They were sent for a few days ago, I believe," murmured Sackville; "but I fear they will be too late," he added faintly, and even as he spoke, he lifted his eyes fearfully to the window.

The light suddenly disappeared; the shutters were closed, and the house was left in darkness.

"It is all over," he gasped, and Beauchamp felt his companion's arm tremble convulsively.

"Come, my good fellow, let us call a cab!" and an empty one passing by, they got in.

"Where shall they put you down?" he asked.

"I—I am staying at Stratheden House; but no; I will not go there, they will be arriving—I shall be in the way."

"I am at the ——— Hotel for to-night, will you come there?"

"Yes, yes!" Sackville answered.

And they went to the Hotel together, and not only there—for shortly after, Sackville had bade "his native land good night," and sailed in the good ship *Ariel*, under the command of Captain Alfred Beauchamp, for the Cape of Good Hope.

That chamber whose light had been the object of Sackville's midnight watch, was hushed and still, from the time day had closed in darkness. The physicians had departed, Lady Rachel had retired to rest—even the husband had despairingly abandoned the side of her who now knew him no more—who had ceased even to offend his feelings by asking in her piteous tones for her mother; and yet that mother for whom she so longed, was expected that night to arrive.

The afflicted parents were hurrying on their way to see their dying child—for such at length they were informed was the state in which the doctors now pronounced her. For the first time they were informed of the fearful truth, for how could they have guessed the sad extent of the evil?

The Duchess having questioned the doctors after her visit to the invalid, had been told there was nothing to warrant so desperate a communication—indeed they had fairly said that it was a case that puzzled them, for there was no actual disease of which they could lay hold.

The Duchess had not again been admitted to the invalid, and she had shrunk from paining the hearts of the absent relatives, by any uselessly distressing communication; therefore that their daughter was very ill, and that any new danger would be the signal for the husband's desiring their presence, was as much as she had insinuated in her letters upon the subject. For several days after she was apprised of her parents' expected speedy arrival, the joy such intelligence imparted had been too vivid for poor Lena in her weak state; for as the excitement exhausted itself, an ominous apathy—almost insensibility—had succeeded. She had asked that night, before those symptoms appeared, to be allowed to see her children, and the two fair little ones were brought to their mother's bedside. She was supported in a sitting posture to kiss them, but—most fearful sign when the mother can forget her children!—it was with an apathy of unconcern—how different from the sad thrilling tenderness with which that privilege was wont to be hailed by her—and then she suffered them to be carried away, as if it were not the last time she was to behold them on earth.

From that time the watchers heard but her low sweet voice in its delirious murmurings, and now, on the night in question, a quiet sleep had stolen over the sufferer, which seemed,—had it not been for the occasional moan or sigh—by its deep profundity, like death itself.

Miss Ricketts—Lena's own maid, and a hired nurse sat near, silent and immovable. They had opened the window to relieve the close atmosphere of the room, and thus they sat for many hours, till the evening churches rang the midnight chimes, and then they heard a movement within the curtained couch—and the faint voice speaking; they listened with suspended breath to catch the oracle-like words the accents of the dying ever seem to the ears of those around them—but they heard but simple, childlike repetitions of names beloved by her.

"Father—mother—my own pet, Cecil—Annie, poor Annie!"—and last of all, "Carry, dear Carry!" in a voice of joy ineffable. Then there was again a pause—and then a soft moaning and murmuring. The maid and nurse arose. All was still. Lena was at peace!

"Gone? Did she speak—did you catch her words?" the husband said, raising his haggard face from his pillow, to the nurse sent to his side with the intelligence that *all was over*; a mission, those more familiar with his nature shrunk from executing.

"Yes, sir, poor dear young lady!" the woman said, wiping her eyes—"she

called over the names of her family—her father, mother, brothers, and sisters, I believe they said they were—”

“And mine—did she not mention mine?”

“I don’t know, sir—perhaps, sir—but her words were not very distinct,” replied the nurse.

“Go, woman, let the room be cleared of all, as soon as possible—the further doors locked—my servant sent to me with writing materials, no one else must come near me.”

His orders were obeyed, and the widower, who had wept for many days, arose, changed his apparel, refreshed himself with food, then wrote and despatched letters to relations of his own and the deceased. He gave some orders to his confidential servant; one was, that the children should be sent with their nurses to the Towers.

Mr. Beauchamp saw no one else—not even his mother—till the day of the funeral, nor was any one but Lena’s maid allowed to approach the chamber of death, where lay his lily wife; so jealous a guard did the husband keep, as if he would not, or could not, believe that the sweet essence had fled.

A note, given in exchange for the hasty message sent by the Camerons from a neighbouring hotel, where they had only arrived at early dawn of day, carried the heart-rending intelligence to the unhappy parents from the husband himself.

“DEAR SIR,

“With the profoundest grief, I have to inform you that my angel wife is no more—she expired at midnight. Every necessary announcement shall be made to you from the proper channel; that I am in no state for further communication of any sort, may be imagined.

“Your afflicted

“LIONEL BEAUCHAMP.”

The father and brother were invited to attend the last sad ceremony—with writhing hearts, allowed to see the remains of the loved daughter and sister reap the final fruits of her splendid marriage—a grand and stately funeral! Many wonderingly asked, “Of what did Mrs. Beauchamp die? she, so fair and young—so gentle—so hemmed round by blessings.” And few could tell. The doctors even—they each had a different opinion—only one person dared to whisper in after days, a suggestion too sad to be spoken.

Poor Lena’s own maid—a quiet, placid person, who had ever looked upon her mistress with a sorrowful spirit—she spoke not of disease of body, but of a silent sorrow—an unspoken, withering grief—a malady which stings—

“More than are numbered in the book of fate,
Taking all shapes, and bearing many names.”

Could such be the case of her angel mistress?

CHAPTER XXXVI.

“She gazed around—

There was no gloom but that within her heart

Ah, this is very loneliness to feel

So wholly desolate, without one thing

That has a portion in our wretchedness.”

L. E. L.

THE summer breeze blew fresh and balmy from the sea—the waves danced lightly in the sunshine, and washed with soft, soothing sound, the smooth sands, which the retreating tide began to render broader and broader on the beach of Worthing, that retired watering-place in Sussex.

It was a beautiful afternoon, some two months succeeding the sorrowful event we have just recorded, that three young girls might have been seen strolling on the esplanade.

Janet, Minny, and Laura Cameron, from their different ages might have personified the several stages of childhood, girlhood, and early womanhood, whilst something of the spirit belonging to each could be traced in the youngest; for with all mirth she frolicked to and fro.

And the eldest—in the quiet expression of her blooming face, and the subdued movements of her buoyant figure, there was that which implied that the liabilities of woman’s heart, to sorrow had begun their action—though something seemed to tell, that grief for others more than for herself had but as yet visited her soul.

But Minny, the merry, rosy, blue-eyed, indiscreet Minny of former years—what had become of her radiant beauty, and the joyous wickedness of her still very blue but now languid eyes—why was she so colourless and drooping—no picture of the early spring time fifteen? Alas! where would she find lovers if she disappointed her mother’s expectation of loveliness, and turned out a plain, delicate-looking daughter, instead of the bright beauty she had promised to become. Some, however, whispered that she was growing like one whose delicate loveliness was remembered as an angel’s perfection—and surely an angel’s beauty it was now indeed!

But it is not on this trio that at this moment we intend to dwell—no, there is another advancing—one, whom the beseeching signals of Minny and Janet, as they stand opposite the large bay-windowed house overlooking the sea, showed they were awaiting.

And the door at length opened, but a servant only appeared, who, directed by

by the young ladies, proceeded to deposit cushions and cloaks on a rocky sheltered spot of the beach below.

But again the door opened—and Janet and Minny stepped forward anxiously to meet the new comer, who with a step so slow and languid was now approaching—her slight form seeming to bend beneath the heavy folds of her deep mourning—her head weighed down by the thick crape veil covering her face.

The two girls made her lean on them, and then they slowly walked on towards the sea where the seat had been arranged.

Laura bounded forward to meet them—and then the invalid, for so she appeared to be, sat down with Janet by her side.

"Put up this heavy veil, darling! sister, and breathe the delicious air—it will do you good, I am sure," and with tender solicitude Janet lifted up the dark covering from the face of the object of her tender attention, who faintly assisted her in the office, and then displayed a face almost as young as her own.

Very lovely was it, even with its deadly pallor and heavy, lifeless sadness, for thus the countenance appeared when the sweet grateful smile which rewarded Janet for her kindness, had faded away—and the poor young widow—for such her sorrowful garb bespoke her—cast her dark, bewildered eyes around, then shrunk back, as it were, loathingly, from the bright scene which seemed indeed to mock her sadness. She closed them as if in pain—her pale lips quivered—and from between her eyelids tears forced themselves down her cheeks—yes, tears—not gushing forth like streams in spring—but as drops wrung from the dried up fount of summer.

But even these seemed to give relief—for the mourner leant her head against the bosom of Janet, and something like a smile—a melancholy one indeed—irradiated her countenance as she lifted her eyes as if beseechingly to the blue canopy above her head.

The pitying Minny took one of her poor sister's hands and pressed it to her lips—whilst Laura, saddened and subdued, sank down at her feet, lifting her fine dark eyes sorrowfully to her face.

Yes, the gay dazzling sun—the diamond-sprayed dancing waves dashing gently against the rocks—the calm, yet exhilarating air of the delicious summer's day—was agony to the mourner's heart—darkness, gloom, cold, would have been far more in character with her feelings.

She was alive—at home, she was enjoying the blessed light of Heaven—the balmy air of happy England, surrounded by kind and anxious friends; but where was *he*—the young, the brave—the beloved?—and she shudderingly thought of that grave in a distant land, and oh! the

horrors of that grave!—where slept the remains of *him* with whom her best affections were for ever buried.

"For her heart in his grave was lying."

There are some strokes of calamity that scathe and scorch the soul—that penetrate to the vital seat of happiness—and blast it, never again to put forth blossoms.

Thus for several moments the group remained; till footsteps being heard, Laura turned round, then started up with an exclamation of endearment, and looking up they saw a nurse approaching, with a child in her arms. It was a pale, delicate boy of nine or ten months, in whose features and interesting expression of countenance there was an unmistakeable likeness to poor Frank Mildmay.

"My own darling child!" murmured the poor young widow, with the earnest, thrilling accents of tenderness, as she suddenly raised her head and extended her arms to receive it, and the child being placed on her knee by the nurse, she pressed it to her bosom in silence.

Yes! it was poor Annie Mildmay, who, with her child, six weeks ago had completed her long, weary voyage, and had been brought by her parents—themselves, with hearts writhing beneath the sharp agony of their late bereavement—to this quiet sea-place, chosen for their joint abode during the first sad period of their mutual affliction. The meeting was most affecting. The last impression of the child from whom it seemed but as yesterday they had parted, was the radiant happy being in the bridal wreath they had wept to see her wear; and now to behold her reappear before their sight, so enfeebled and subdued by grief and fatigue, and shrouded in that lugubrious garb, her once bright face so dimmed and misery-stricken in expression! and then to have another grief to reveal—to add affliction to her already sorely wounded soul—that not for one alone they mourned—that the grave had closed over another fair young head—a dearly beloved sister claimed a portion of her sorrow! All this is too saddening for the pages of fiction.

And then in that long, weary, solitary voyage there—was indeed matter enough of woe, were we inclined to dwell on the theme. What would that period have been to the young widow without the trance-like calm to the heavily distressed which is often in mercy sent to lull the anguish, of which else, who could bear the weight and live?

How sadly had one been watching from the bay-windowed house the movements of the young group!—the mother in her deep mourning dress, her face pale, and aged within the few last months; scalding tears had dimmed the lustre of those

sparkling eyes—anxiety and grief had changed the expression of her smiling countenance—a filmy mist now gathered over her full hazel eyes.

Subduing her own rankling sorrow, the mother devoted herself, with the tenderest solicitude, to the solace of the poor widowed Annie; passing months in that same quiet spot, unmindful even that Janet should thus lose her time and freshness in its desolation—as contented to see her, with indefatigable care, devoting herself to the solace and comfort of her poor sister, as she would formerly have been, to behold her the admired of all admirers, in a far different sphere of action.

Late in the autumn, however, the General was earnestly invited by the Duke, who was at Beechy Place, to come to him for a week's shooting, and to bring Janet with him; they had only a small party in the house, merely a few gentlemen, and it would do them both good. Since the death of poor Lena, the General had not mixed in society, only varying the monotony of his life, at Worthing, by occasional expeditions to London, on business. His tender heart had suffered greatly from his parental sorrow; and he was not then in spirits even to feel a wish to exert himself in his favourite sport.

But Mrs. Cameron affectionately persuaded him to go.

"Do go, dear father, for Janet's sake," Annie also interposed, with the winning, persuasive fondness of former days; "she must not be allowed to give up all amusement for our sakes."

Mrs. Cameron, then turning her eyes upon Janet, said—

"Yes, the change would certainly do her good."

Janet smiled, and did not say she would rather not go, for she really thought the visit would be a pleasure to her; so the General, with a sigh, said it should be so, "for Janet's sake."

Now, Mrs. Cameron would not have gone to Beechy, herself, for the world. The painful associations the place must awaken, would have amounted to agony. But the General's reluctance to his visit seemed not to proceed from the same source—perhaps because men are less generally prone to susceptibility on such points—sense, more than imagination, governing their feelings; or, perhaps, because from the sharp sting of self-reproach, her husband's conscience was clear, whilst hers *never* could be so.

The piteous glance of her lamb-like Lena would haunt her imagination, and smite her heart in that fatal drawing-room. Her submissive tears—her meek petitions—all that she had shut her eyes and heart against then would rise up and accuse her now.

But Janet and her father went to Beechy, and received, as usual, the warmest welcome from their friends. Janet was looking very well, and handsome; and the Duchess was delighted to gain so attractive and enlivening an acquisition to her little party.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"For thou hast been beloved—it is no dream,
No false mirage for thee, the fervent love.
The rainbow still unreach'd, the ideal gleam,
That ever seems before, beyond, above,
Far off to shine."

MRS. HERMAN.

"I HAVE not a very amusing party for you, dear Janet," her Grace said to her young visiter, the afternoon of her arrival; "no one but old friends—with one exception, however," she added, smiling, "Lord Alfred Townshend; he will do, Janet, will he not?"

Janet blushed and smiled, and said she should be very glad to see him.

Lord Alfred seemed very glad to see her, too, and would have devoted himself the whole evening to her entertainment, whilst the elders were absorbed in whist and conversation; but the General soon joined them, as if with a nervous desire to interrupt the *tête-à-tête*.

The poor father—so easy and unconcerned, once—the idea of anything like attention to a daughter made him fidgety now!

Upon that same ottoman where the goodly couple now sat—the fascinating, handsome Lord Alfred and his graceful daughter Janet—had he often beheld another pair, and the remembrances which these associations conjured up made it painful to his feelings, even to see his Janet, though under totally different circumstances, in a position in any way assimilating.

The Duchess marked these symptoms, and rallied the General during their visit, on the subject—"You will frighten away all poor Janet's admirers, General, if you prove such an Argus-eyed chaperon."

"So much the better!" the father answered quickly, "let them be frightened away with all my heart." And a tear started to his eye as he spoke.

But Lord Alfred did not seem to be composed of any such faint-hearted materials, and Janet's admirer he evidently was; if nothing more. But then a year ago he had professed friendly regard for the Cameron family in general, and made no concealment of his admiration for and interest in Janet, whom he had known as a child, when he had been on such familiar terms in her father's house in Ireland; and now it might seem as a matter

of course that she, as the young lady of the party, and a good-looking young lady withal, should be the object of his attentions; but certainly he was *dévoûé* to a degree likely to be dangerous to a girl of any susceptibility of feeling.

There they were one afternoon together, now leaning over that same little wicket-gate inhaling the fresh October breeze which blew upon them from the downs—now promenading up and down the shaded shrubbery-walk; the Duchess, their late companion, having deserted them, feeling too chilly to remain.

"And your sister Annie—Mrs. Mildmay I mean—is she as lovely as ever? what a charming little widow she must make!" Lord Alfred remarked, *apropos* to some other family topics on which he had been leading Janet to speak, evincing great interest in her relations.

"Yes, poor Annie!" Janet replied, in a sad and rather reproving tone—for the apparent levity of Lord Alfred's manner of expression was so much at variance with the almost sanctity with which her deep and holy grief had environed the sorrowing Annie in the eyes of all immediately surrounding her—"Yes, poor Annie," Janet continued, "she must ever be lovely; but she is much changed—her beauty is of a very different character now, Lord Alfred—so subdued and sorrow-stricken, I think you would scarcely recognise her."

"Oh, yes, trust me for that, Miss Cameron! she may indeed have lost some of the lustre of her eyes, the colouring from her cheeks—but with all that I should never be at a loss to recognise Annie—Mrs. Mildmay, I mean."

"Oh, yes, Lord Alfred, you are very right; there must be something very intrinsically beautiful in her, for strange it is, but, as you say, I could almost think her lovelier than ever—still it is a beauty of a very sad cast," and Janet's eyes overflowed with tears. "To see one so young," she continued, "robbed of all her brightness—so dimmed—so blighted!"

"Oh, pray, my dear Miss Cameron, do not go so far as to say that," Lord Alfred remarked, kindly, but with an unbelieving smile, as he gazed into his companion's glistening eyes of blue, "there is no such thing as blight at one-and-twenty, young lady fair—"

Janet shook her head.

"Do you really believe," persisted Lord Alfred, "that your sister will never get over poor little Mildmay's death? Oh, my dear Miss Cameron, you little know the world."

"But what has poor Annie's grief to do with the world? hers is no worldly sorrow, believe me."

And if any other had spoken those seem-

ingly slighting words on such a hallowed theme, Janet would have dropped the subject, but there was something in Lord Alfred which disarmed her heart of all offence towards him, and she continued—

"I do not mean that she will never be resigned to her great loss—that she never will be cheerful again—no, she is too good, too religious for that—but—"

"You do not think she will ever marry again," his lordship added, finishing the sentence for her.

"Marry again? oh no!" exclaimed Janet, colouring, "I am quite sure—at least, I cannot fancy poor Annie ever marrying again."

"You did well to put in a clause of doubt, Miss Cameron," Lord Alfred continued with a smile; "never be sure of anything in this world—much less of a beautiful young creature like your sister proving the 'widow indeed,' as your words would imply—such constancy is very rare—what right is there to expect it in poor Mildmay's case more than in any other?"

"But Annie was so devotedly attached to poor Frank—the circumstances attending his death were so dreadful—so uncommon—calculated truly to impress the awful event indelibly on her mind—there was so much to bind the memory of their love around her very heart-strings, for ever!—and then, she is so wrapt up in her child!"

"Well, well, *nous verrons*," Lord Alfred interrupted, gazing upon the young girl's eager, glowing countenance; "but on one subject let me advise you, Miss Cameron," he continued, after an instant's pause, "take warning from your sister's fate, and never make a love-match!"

Janet suddenly turned away to hide the deep blush which, she knew not why, mounted to her cheeks at this address.

"But I think you will be wiser," his lordship continued, "there is something in your character more resembling your charming mother's, I should say, of whom you much remind me—you will, I am sure, be wise enough to take care to set your affections on something higher or safer than a poor young subaltern like Mildmay. I am sure you will be more cautious from your sister's example."

There was something in these words, and the slight tinge of satire mingled in them, which would have hurt and piqued poor Janet had not her feelings at the moment been warm in the cause of Annie and her true love. She therefore again turned her ingenuous countenance towards her companion, exclaiming in an earnest, energetic tone,

"Far from it, Lord Alfred! With all poor Annie's sorrows and sufferings I envy her—To have been loved, and to have

loved like her—to have had it in her power to prove that love—by deeds and not by words alone—to suffer what she has suffered—may, even to be left with only the remembrance of this love, would be far more precious to my heart, than to share the fate of many who have married only to be rich in all but that pure endless affection. Alas! we have had indeed a sad instance in our family of a different sort of marriage—my poor—poor sister Lena! You know,” Janet continued, whilst tears flowed from her eyes as she spoke, “she, dear angel, married a very rich man from this very house. I was then a child, but I remember well how fortunate I thought her, when I saw all the beautiful jewels, and heard of the grand houses and establishments prepared for her—and how did it turn out? Oh no! poor Annie—I am sure she would not recall the past with all the horrors and miseries through which it led her—no, not for any advantage the world could afford—oh no, she would gladly, poor soul, live over every hour she spent with him; even—” and the young voice faltered, “even the last wretched moments, when in her arms he—that dear brave Frank breathed his last sigh—for with his dying breath he blessed her, his good, kind, faithful Annie, for the love she had so firmly borne him.”

There was a pause—for even Lord Alfred was touched by the simple, unaffected feeling with which the beautiful Janet told the sad story. At last he said, gazing with an expression of much interest in her face—

“But do you think that poverty is essential to the tender passion, the cause of which you plead so eloquently? will nothing do but love in a cottage?—Are all poor mortals with a rent-roll exceeding Frank Mildmay’s, to be doomed to banishment from your heart?”

“Oh no, Lord Alfred, I do not mean that!” Janet exclaimed with some earnestness; but when the words had passed her lips, she crimsoned deeply, for Lord Alfred’s eyes were fixed upon her face with some significance in their expression.

“Of course—of course I mean—” she continued, but the explanation being one of some delicacy, she paused embarrassed.

Lord Alfred ventured to take her hand, and with gentle yet respectful fervour slightly pressed it, saying in a low and more serious voice, than he had before assumed—

“For if *that* were the case, how many poor mortals there would be—one at least I am sure,—who would wish all their worldly goods cast to the dogs, if by such means alone, favour is to be won in Janet Cameron’s eyes!”

Janet withdrew her hand and slightly erected her graceful form—but that gentle

pressure—those low-toned words—what a thrill they sent through her whole frame!—how quickly her young heart beat in her breast!

But no terrible Lady Rachel was required to suggest to Janet that it was discreet to terminate her shrubby walk, however its interest might seem now to be only commencing; and the gathering shades on the beech trees affording a justifiable excuse for breaking it off without any particular abruptness, she said, in a voice slightly tremulous, that “it was becoming late and that they had better return to the house.”

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

I could have wept to see her widow’s weeds
Braided so meekly o’er a frame that showed
Life’s loveliest prime, though touch’d as by the
breath
Of slow-consuming sorrow!

ANONYMOUS.

LORD ALFRED did not again entreat for another turn—or renew the flattering strain as they walked to the house. Indeed Janet heard nothing more whispered in her ear, to make her foolish heart flutter, till the moment of parting, a day or two after, when Lord Alfred, whilst pressing her hand in adieu, inquired of the General whether he might be allowed to run down to Worthing for a few sea-breezes—some of these days; the General answering with a smile, that he could not take upon himself the responsibility of forbidding his lordship from visiting that lively place.

Lord Alfred turned to Janet with an expression in his handsome face, which she—poor girl! thought spoke volumes, and then said, “I shall certainly run down very shortly, if possible, to see Mrs. Cameron; if you,” he added in a lowered tone, “will give me leave, Miss Janet.”

And shortly after Lord Alfred Townshend made his appearance on the beach of Worthing, where he had arrived the night before.

“Rather particular certainly this looks, does it not?” Mrs. Cameron murmured to her husband as they were walking together after the meeting; Lord Alfred lingering behind with Janet and her younger sisters.

“Nonsense!” answered the General hastily, with a look which might have been deemed expressive of displeasure rather than the contrary, “you are always so hasty in your conclusions, Laura; I think he might just as well have stayed away.”

Mrs. Cameron did not reply to this, for she had found how sensitively touchy her husband had become on the least ap-

proach of any such ideas concerning his daughters, as her words might seem to imply—and she had herself professed to have become callous and indifferent on the subject. So she only said that she supposed they must ask Lord Alfred to dinner.

The General replied "Yes, of course!" but added, that "it would be a nuisance to poor Annie."

But Annie had her own private apartment, in order that she might feel independent of such emergencies, and keep secluded if she felt so inclined.

Such innovations, however, never failed to discompose the General, who could not endure the banishment from his side, at dinner, or from his society, in the evening, his Annie, whom he now seemed to love more fondly and tenderly than he had ever done; she and her child constituting his most absorbing interest and anxiety.

Lord Alfred came to dinner that evening, but only Janet and her parents composed the party at table. A pretty, delicate boy was brought into the drawing-room before dinner, in his white frock and broad black sash, to be fondled and petted by the whole party.

"Poor little Frank!" as his young aunts called him.

"Poor little Frank, indeed!" said Lord Alfred, lifting the child with playful kindness. "How like he is to his father! but there is something about him like his mamma, too!" and then, as the child, at the mention of the word, pointed his little finger to the door, and wistfully cried out, "Mamma!" Lord Alfred said to Janet, as he replaced the baby in Minny's arms, which were ready to receive him, that he trusted he was not to be the cause of keeping Mrs. Mildmay away.

"Oh, no!" Janet answered. "At least, she often dines early, with the children, and must always be in the nursery to see little Frank put to bed; and to-night I do not think she would be equal to seeing any one; for this has been a trying day to her," the sister added, in a low, sad tone. "It is her wedding-day: the first, indeed, that has proved to her so sad. The last was a very different one; her husband was with his wife and child; and they were so happy together!" and Janet's eyes glistened with pitying tears.

The General, when he left the dining-room, went for some time to sit with his daughter, and Lord Alfred was left to entertain Janet and her mother. He made himself as agreeable as was his wont; and Mrs. Cameron he thought as delightful as ever, though in her looks and spirits there were evidences that care and sorrow had been busy since they met in Ireland.

The daughter was somewhat more silent and subdued than on their last

meeting, but it might be owing to her mother's presence. Those kindling cheeks, when he suddenly addressed her—that faltering voice—those timid eyes! How could Lord Alfred fail to interpret these signs in the way which to him seemed but as natural, mere matter of course consequences of the attention he had paid the poor girl?

He whispered to her mother how handsome he thought her daughter Janet had become, but mercifully abstained from the cruel kindness of feeding too much *la belle passion* by more individual attention, such as he had so unsparingly lavished upon Janet at Beechy Place.

The following day he purposed going on to Brighton, and called on the Camerons to make his adieux at an earlier hour than it might have been supposed from his usual fashionable habits.

Seeing the young Laura in the little garden before the house, about to enter the room—the window of which opened to the ground—he approached without being perceived by the little girl, who stood with her back to him.

He came close behind her, with the intention of giving her a playful surprise, but his purpose was frustrated by the unexpected sight which directly presented itself to his eyes.

Almost immediately before the window, holding the little Frank in her arms, stood a slight figure, with a fair young face, of which Lord Alfred, for one second, could not doubt the identity; though the heavy folds of the sombre garb which swept around the slender, graceful shape—the mournful widow's cap, shading the countenance, unrelieved but by the narrowest braid of jetty hair, had worked a change so touching in the appearance of her he beheld, that Lord Alfred felt a thrill pass through his frame, such as the man of the world rarely remembered before to have experienced.

The young widow, startled by the sudden and unexpected apparition, stepped back, the colour rushing to her pale cheeks and brow—her eyes gleaming for an instant with the wild radiance which used to charm Lord Alfred's heart of yore, rendering her still more like—but oh, how different from her former self! Her present garb was so strangely inconsistent with, and irreconcilable to Lord Alfred's conception.

There is ever some embarrassment to the intruder in a meeting of a similar nature, but Lord Alfred, whatever he might feel, carried it off with the graceful ease, ever at his command. He could not do otherwise than step in at the window, now opened for Laura's ingress, and with an apology for the intrusion into which he had been led unawares, offered his hand

with a happy mixture of warm pleasure and serious reverence, consistent with a memory of the past and a consideration of the present; and mastering with an effort the first impulse of annoyance and agitation the abrupt meeting must naturally have caused, Annie with the frank sweetness of other days held out her hand also, and strove to murmur some expressions of pleasure at seeing her old friend.

And thus it seemed as if the scene would have been well got over—all the disagreeabilities of a formal planned meeting happily avoided by this accidental interview. But no—it would not do, there were remembrances too closely connected with the individual poor Annie now beheld; Athlone and all its associations and recollections rose vividly before her mind's eye. It seemed as if the presence of Lord Alfred brought back a breath of the past—of her lost spring with all its joys and gladness. The sweet illusion quickly passed away—leaving the young mourner with an oppressive burden of remembrance. She struggled for a moment with her feelings, but her lips quivered, her breast heaved, she clasped her hands convulsively, and at length a shower of tears which would not—*could* not be stayed, gushed forth, and yielding her child to Laura, who stood enticing the little creature to come to her, she turned away.

Lord Alfred felt much distressed, but he pursued the wisest course under such circumstances; he took no notice of the scene, but turned his attention to the child and its young nurse, with whom he was soon engaged in a playful game of romps, which effectually drowned the sounds of the low sobs which might else have been heard, as poor Annie stood leaning her head against the mantelpiece.

In a few minutes, however, Lord Alfred, looking round, saw the young mother again standing by his side, calm, though very pale, but with a smile of pleased, loving expression as she watched the movements of her little boy whom his Lordship was holding in his arms, and inciting to that childish merriment, which it charmed her heart to behold.

Janet then opportunely joined the party, and by her presence broke much of the *gêne* which a continuance of the scene would have occasioned by the, comparatively speaking, *tête-à-tête*.

Lord Alfred lingered, conversing quietly with the sisters, till it was necessary to attend to the hints conveyed to him that Mrs. Cameron was up stairs expecting to see him.

Annie did not accompany them, or make her appearance in the drawing-room. He did not see her again.

Mrs. Cameron talked to him of the sadly blighted lustre of her poor Annie's looks

—of her melancholy fate—her broken spirits; Lord Alfred agreed that she was much changed—that he should scarcely have known her—but that time, &c., &c., would heal and restore her brightness; and, then, as if to change the melancholy impression, he spoke of Janet's bloom and loveliness; and when she entered soon after, dressed to accompany her father and himself to Brighton, as previously agreed upon, the fastidious eye of Lord Alfred did seem to be most unfeignedly struck by the very patrician appearance of the handsome, graceful girl, and a peculiarly thoughtful expression stole over his countenance as he observingly regarded her, which might well have suggested to a less anxiously interested perception than Mrs. Cameron's, the idea that some considerations of a serious nature were passing through his Lordship's mind at the moment concerning her fair daughter.

Janet returned in high and happy spirits, having enjoyed her expedition extremely; and Lord Alfred, she found occasion to tell her mother, had also enjoyed his visit to Worthing, and intended shortly to repeat it.

Summer, however, returned ere he did so. The house at Worthing was still retained by the Cameron family, for the place suited Annie and her child—indeed all of the party, just then—the subdued spirits of the parents—the juvenile tastes of the younger ones!—And Janet?—Few there are who know not how the dullest streams of life may be coloured with the brightness of a delightful dream, in which the fancy is enthralled.

The Strathedens had gone again abroad, the Duke's now confirmed ill-health requiring a milder climate. Janet had been invited to accompany them, but she felt no inclination to leave her home; and none at home could bear to part for so long a period with the life, and, as it seemed, the hope of their saddened circle. Besides, Alick, who, for the last two years, had been with his regiment on foreign service, was expected to join them immediately, to remain with them for several weeks in the course of the summer months, when the General would be absent on his tour of inspection.

Gerald and his wife were also expected to visit them. That young couple now rejoiced in the possession of thirty thousand pounds, and a daughter, who as yet had proved but a blessing, by engrossing so entirely the thoughts and interest of her mother, that she diverted her pursuits into a course effectually inconsistent with the dissipated frivolous tastes which had latterly become such a source of disquiet to her husband, who now had perhaps reason for complaints of a different nature; for no man approves of his wife

becoming completely absorbed in any occupation in which he cannot possibly have much share—and where was Agnes ever now, in body or soul, but in the nursery or its concerns?—neglecting everything—even her own appearance!—her only handiwork, wasting roll after roll of narrow ribbon of every hue the rainbow could boast, in order to heap bow upon bow, or rather rosette upon rosette, upon the tiny cap, swelled out to a preposterous size by the unwonted quantity of lace and ornaments added to it.

But to return to the summer which brought such a noble guest to honour the genteel desolation of Worthing!

There Lord Alfred was again spending the interval between the fag end of the London season and the first of September, ever to be seen abroad, riding, driving, or walking, with some member of the Cameron family.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Dost thou deny it? I have seen thee look
Into the sunny regions of his hair;
And gaze upon his brow. Oh! shut thy lips—
I want no words: thou dost confess it now.
Be silent; all is well!
BARRY CORNWALL.

ON the return of a member of a family to his home, over which, during his absence, some blight has fallen—in which some melancholy event has taken place—or death has been busy—it oft seems strange to him, who then almost for the first time begins to realize the idea that sorrow has pierced every heart, to behold all things apparently the same—all faces perhaps bearing their wonted smiles—tears and sighs passed away! Some feeling like this Alick experienced the first evening he spent with his family on his arrival at Worthing. A dearly beloved sister had, under circumstances of no common sadness, sunk into an early grave—and since last he had found himself in the household circle, the destroyer death had cast its dark blight over another—that bright one in whose happiness all were so closely concerned.

The affectionate-hearted Alick had dreaded the sight of the dimmed bliss which suffering and distress must have effected in his once happy, gleeful home. But no!—as he looked and listened—his own spirits much depressed—he might almost have fancied that no change had taken place. There he saw Cecil and Laura filling the room with their careless merry glee; and there was Janet, bright and buoyant, singing and laughing, with Lord Alfred by her side. And his mother—he had feared the most to look on her—and yet her countenance was cheerful—if

not as of yore, yet more so than he had dared to expect. In her eye still gleamed the same lustre of pleasure, as she sat apart and watched the several objects of her interest—a lustre he had almost despaired of ever seeing kindled there again.

True, he might have marked some signs in her appearance which told a different story, yet the beauty was still preserved which dazzled the son's partial eyes, and prevented him from observing them. Mrs. Cameron still wore a black dress, though the year's deep mourning was laid entirely aside by the young ones of the party.

And the father—he also was there—his countenance beaming as ever with the same parental fondness—kindness and intellect emanating from it—his bearing manly, yet cheerful—his smile of indescribable benevolence, speaking his entire sympathy in the happiness of others.

But the door opened, and another glided in amongst the party, contemplated by the thoughtful Alick. It was his sister Annie—she smiled on him and all around her, as she took her seat at a work-table near her mother's.

A calm and beautiful smile it was; and her presence seemed dearly welcome, as every countenance told it to be, although it imparted a chastened influence over each and all—as when the pure, pale moonbeams first fall upon the landscape lately gilded by the setting sun.

"Well, dear Annie—are you released at last?" asked the General, rising and taking his seat by her side; "the little rogue—is he fast asleep for the night?"

"Oh yes, father, some time now," she answered, with another smile; "but he fell asleep with my arm round him, and I feared to move. Janet, why do you stop in the middle of your song? pray do not let me interrupt you."

So Janet recommenced the song Lord Alfred had begged for, and to which he had been lending such earnest attention ere this interruption had taken place.

It was the well-known song of Mrs. Norton,

"Beloved one!"

one of those familiar strains for which the soul with any feeling, or rather sentiment—

"Untired can ask and ask again,
Ever in its melodious strain
Finding a spell unknown before.

And Janet had a deep rich voice, well calculated to do justice to its melody. But there was more than voice in her performance—some deeper magic than vocal art alone, which seemed to lend to the music such touching effect—the low clear notes gushing from the young songstress's

breast—the quivering of the flute-like swell, and, more than all,

“That fond and plaintive lingering on each word of love so long.”

One at least of her audience knew and felt the sweet power.

A few moments before he had been listening with a feeling of comfortable, calm complacency, nay, of fascinated pleasure—for who can resist—who can listen callously to the charm of feeling himself the “Beloved one?” But now the spell had been broken! and it seemed as if the fond flattery had palled upon his senses; for his eyes wandered absently, from the musician behind whom he was seated, towards the corner where sat the parents and Annie.

And still, as though in absent attention, Lord Alfred remained with arms crossed and head bent down; still, if closely regarded, his eyes might have been seen fixed in the same direction—his ears deaf as the adder to the sweet charmer by his side.

Certainly he might be excused some natural interest in the observation of the sight which struck his eye. Annie Mildmay had, the day before, by her mother’s persuasion, laid aside her widow’s cap; Lord Alfred had not seen her since, and was of course struck by the alteration.

The act had been one of little import to the wearer herself—there was a weight of inward remembrance too great for outward sign to have much importance in her consideration. Her mother suggested, that as a year and a half had passed, the badge of woe was no longer necessary; so she had quietly relinquished it, without much show of sentiment on the occasion, till the little boy had wonderingly stroked his hand over her uncovered head, in observation of the change.

Lord Alfred saw her then again more like the Annie of former days. In other respects her dress was little less sombre than before, but how different was the aspect given to her whole appearance by the absence of the lugubrious covering! Her beautifully formed head was now disencumbered—the dark glossy hair now again as of old, the simple ornament of a face, from which even sorrow had scarcely stolen any of its peculiar youthfulness.

Scarcely had the singer’s voice died away, than she cast a timid glance around for the reward of her services from him who had solicited them.

Lord Alfred thanked her with an indifference somewhat inconsistent with the earnestness with which he had besought them, and rising abruptly, wandered to the work-table, where, after speaking to Mrs. Cameron for a minute or two, he turned towards

Annie, and inquired with much apparent interest, whether the embroidered frock upon which the young mother was employed was intended for Master Frank—she was assisted by her gentle pale sister, Minny, who, instead of, as in days of yore, romping with his Lordship, sat drooping over her work with tranquil interest—and then Annie lifted up her calm eyes, and with a faint sweet smile answered in the affirmative.

His Lordship took the seat vacated by the General, and began to converse gently and cheerfully. Annie attempted to enter into the spirit of what he said, but inwardly sighed to think how great an effort it was now, to carry on with any semblance of interest or attention, conversation the most commonplace, with one who was indifferent to her; and wondered not that Lord Alfred soon seemed to weary of the thankless office and rose to exchange the forced languid smiles which met his sallies of wit—her pointless *distract* answers and remarks, for the glowing smiles of Janet.

Though he had been, during his stay at ———, almost a constant visiter at her father’s house, up to this very evening, but very little intercourse had been exchanged between Annie and Lord Alfred. So retiring and subdued had been the spirits and inclinations of the young widow—so absorbed was she by her child, and above all so surrounded as it were by an almost sacred halo of calm sadness, she seemed as a being apart from all, but the immediate members of the family—one on whom, even Lord Alfred had appeared to feel an almost reverential awe restrain him from intruding the commonplace intercourse carried on between him and the rest of the party.

But this night, as we have seen, Lord Alfred made an effort to break through the restraint, and though this attempt did not meet with any encouraging success—yet it certainly, in a measure, seemed to have broken the ice—or perhaps the sensitive heart of Annie reproved her for not exerting herself to show more warmth of manner, more consideration towards one not only associated with many sad and dear remembrances, but likely, as it began to be apparent to every eye, to demand a still more definite claim upon her regard.

The distance between Lord Alfred and Annie Mildmay certainly seemed insensibly to melt away. He presumed now to join Janet in her walks, when her sister was her sole companion. Often might he be seen following the sisters along the beach, carrying in his arms with the tender care of a father the widow’s little son.

And could she refuse him grateful smiles and sweet words of thanks for his kindness?

"Janet, darling," Mrs. Cameron said one day, "Lord Alfred stays now, I think, till the 31st?"

"Yes, Mamma!" murmured the daughter addressed, "he shoots at G——d, I think, on the 1st."

"Dear child, he has been here a long time; there can be but one meaning to all this—and yet—. Come, dear, do not bury yourself entirely in that frame—but tell me, has he said nothing yet to give you certainty as to his intentions? In fact, dear Janet, to speak plainly, has nothing like a proposal yet come?"

Janet obediently dropped her needle, but without raising her head, in a tone slightly tinged with agitation, murmured—

"No, Mamma—nothing!"

"Janet," her mother continued, after a slight pause, "your father will not believe you care at all about Lord Alfred—is he right—and am I wrong, when I fancy my Janet's heart is somewhat interested in his favour? Can you deny it? Oh, that tell-tale face—it will not do. Dear child, I think after all, you will prove the first daughter who will really reward my love and care, by giving me an opportunity of witnessing her happiness."

"But, Mamma," said Janet timidly, "is it enough that I should love Lord Alfred? Yes," she continued, starting up and blushing as the word escaped her lips, "*love* him: it was you, Mamma, who first suggested the idea to me—yes, it was you who sang his praises, till you made me image him as a being worthy of the most devoted love—and then—"

"Then you proved by your own experience of his merits that he was indeed perfection. Is it not so, dearest?" the mother smilingly inquired. "Yes!—but what were you going to say, Janet?"

"Why, Mamma, that—that—oh, is it certain," and she clasped her hands with passionate agitation, "that Lord Alfred loves me?"

"My dear Janet, what do you think yourself? who can be so good a judge?—what else can be argued from his long stay in this most deadly lonely place—his constant attention?"

"True, Mamma; yet sometimes of late I have fancied that his manner towards me has become colder—and oh, mother, if, after all, I have deceived myself in ever supposing that he meant anything serious! He is a friend of all our family—for instance, look how kind he is to little Frank—I never knew, until I saw him with that dear child, what an affectionate heart was his," and poor Janet drooped her head despairingly.

"My dear Janet, do not be faint-hearted—that cannot be—even if there were a possibility of his having intended nothing

but to play with your feelings, your father, your brothers, would never allow it after all that has passed."

"Oh, Mamma, not for the world!" exclaimed Janet, in affright.

"No, no, dear child, be not afraid—nothing shall be done to hurt your delicacy—I am sure the game is in your own hands."

"Oh, Mamma!" the poor girl exclaimed, the genuine dignity of her nature revolting at this speech.

"Yes, yes, Janet, you need not look so proudly scornful; before the 1st of September all, I am sure, will be well."

Yet that day was fast approaching. The General wrote with some impatience, inquiring how long Lord Alfred intended to stay.

Alick also looked with suspicion on the lagging lover—what brother can endure seeing a sister's feelings trifled with?

Mrs. Cameron pleaded patience for her favourite; yet as the time drew so near, some misgivings on her own part had induced her to deem it expedient to enlist Janet herself as an agent in the furtherance of the much desired crisis.

The mother's heart grown timid—alas, not wiser by sorrowful experience! shrunk with some inward tremor at the prospect presented by this new case in which her worldly spirit had been engaged—to look on the love she had nursed and fanned, and kept alive so dexterously, so successfully, and to tremble lest her work might form the misery of the young heart which was its shrine. Had she yet to see a daughter writhing under the misery of unrequited, betrayed affection?

CHAPTER XL.

"Why didst thou say
I was brighter far
Than the bright ray
Of the evening star?
Why didst thou come
Seeking my home
Till I believed that thy love was sincere?"

HAYNES BAYLEY.

THE 30th of August arrived—the very day before the one fixed for the departure of Lord Alfred.

He looked grave, thoughtful, and pale—even more so than Janet; for she for very pride assumed the mantle of careless gaiety, though the forced smiles and trembling lips but too plainly spoke it all mockery—pale, grave and thoughtful, yet he spoke not!

Mrs. Cameron, sanguine to the last, preserved as much as possible her usual demeanour, when early that evening he took what was evidently to be his last dinner with them. His expression was ab-

stracted when he looked on Janet—his words calm and careless.

Alick's manner was coldness itself—his eyes almost stern as he glanced with an anxious uneasy expression at his sister as she sat opposite, vainly endeavouring to assume an unconcerned demeanour.

Annie had excused herself, as she often did, from joining the dinner table, and was out on the beach with her child and younger sisters. That she participated fully in the anxious interest Janet's case excited, was very evident—indeed, a peculiar nervous solicitude on the subject might have been observed in her manner, though she seemed rather to avoid the subject with her mother.

Almost immediately after the ladies had quitted the dining-room, Lord Alfred abruptly rose from his seat and wandered to the window, looked upon the sea scene on which the setting sun was casting its golden autumn rays, then saying it was a lovely evening, took his hat, then strolled out through the open window. A flush passed over Alick's brow, and a contemptuous expression curled his lip which seemed to say—"He shall not thus escape!"

Alick also rose and went into the drawing-room, where he found his mother and Janet. Well he understood the harassed, careworn expression pictured on the countenance of the former, the anxious significance of the glance she turned upon him.

He however remained but a few minutes in the room; after exchanging some indifferent words with his mother, and looking towards Janet with a keen eye of observation, he said he would go out for a stroll.

Poor Janet! she sat at the window gazing without—her cheek very pale—a dull abstracted expression in her full azure eyes.

Alick wandered thoughtfully on to the plat of green opposite the house, searchingly looking around him, and unsuccessfully it seemed for some time. But at length his eyes met a party consisting of his two young sisters and a nurse conducting a donkey, on which little Frank was seated, and whom they said they were taking to bed.

"And where have you been?" Alick asked.

"Oh, such a long way, such a delightful walk we have had with Annie!" Laura exclaimed.

"And what have you done with Annie?" he demanded.

"Oh, she is behind," Minny answered, "rather tired, I am afraid; the donkey and we were too fast for her, returning home. Lord Alfred is with her."

Alick proceeded not very far ere he came in sight of Lord Alfred and his sister.

They were walking apparently in silence, Lord Alfred with his eyes bent to the ground; Annie, with a step different from the calm, subdued movement which had become usual to her—it might indeed have appeared hurried and agitated.

They came up to him; Alick spoke to Annie and she slid her arm into his, and he felt it tremble. Her veil was down, so he could not see her face distinctly, and she only spoke a few hurried words ere they reached the house.

Lord Alfred did not leave them, but walked in silence by their side, with the same downcast but proudly sad demeanour.

Annie withdrew her arm from Alick's, and hastened in as soon as they reached the door. Lord Alfred followed her with his eyes, murmuring that he would return to make his adieux in the course of the evening.

Alick did not *now* follow his Lordship—new ideas suggesting themselves to his mind. He returned to the drawing-room, where he found his mother and three sisters; Janet, in the same seat and attitude as he had left her.

There they sat, a somewhat sombre party, till it was dusk, and then Janet glided from the room, and a few minutes after, Lord Alfred came in amongst them.

Mrs. Cameron rallied herself from her abstraction, and said they had better ring for lights; but Lord Alfred begged that they would not do so. He sat down, but it was evidently an effort to him to engage in the conversation Mrs. Cameron attempted.

"You go to G—d, do you not?" she inquired in a constrained voice.

"Yes, no!" Lord Alfred answered in an incoherent, hesitating tone; "that is to say, such was my original intention; but now I think I shall go to London, and then abroad for a little time."

"Indeed!" Mrs. Cameron answered with an unnatural voice and expression. Then followed a dead silence, broken by Lord Alfred's rising; holding out his hand to Mrs. Cameron, he said, hurriedly—

"I think I must wish you good night; I have a few arrangements to make for tomorrow;" and he shook the hand she mechanically gave him; did the same to Minny and Laura, then looked towards Alick with the same intention, but Alick suffered the movement to pass unnoticed, saying, coldly—

"Perhaps your Lordship will see me again this evening?"

Lord Alfred answered in the affirmative, and was about to quit the room, when suddenly he paused, and turned round again, saying, in a tone slightly tinged with embarrassment—

"And Miss Janet, pray, remember me most kindly to her—I am sorry not to have seen her, to bid her farewell."

And then his familiar step was heard descending the staircase, the door banged, and he was gone!

A few scalding tears slowly wrung themselves from the mother's eyes as she sat for half-an-hour, when the moon beginning to cast its rays into the room, she arose, and bidding the children ring for lights, went up stairs. She did not reappear, but an hour after, when Minny went to bid her mother good night, she returned to tell Alick that he was wanted.

Alick found his mother awaiting him with a pale, anxious countenance.

"Alick," she said, in a low voice, "what is to be done?—this is too much to bear. What can the man mean? Can such conduct be allowed to pass without remark?"

"It is unaccountable conduct indeed, mother, and you may be sure that I feel little inclined to allow the matter to rest here," Alick replied with quick determination. "If my doubts had not been raised this evening as to the true state of the case—before this I should have taken some step—at any rate that Lord Alfred has behaved most villanously towards dear Janet is very clear—where is she, poor girl?"

Mrs. Cameron pointed to a door leading into an adjoining room, and Alick, softly opening it, entered.

There was poor Janet prostrate on the bed, on which she had thrown herself in utter despair.

One quick glance sufficed the brother—he turned away and rejoined his mother with a countenance pale with distress.

"You see, Alick, how it is," Mrs. Cameron exclaimed, with a quivering lip; "I have had a most distressing scene with the poor girl. And," she continued in great agitation, "it is I—yes, I who have brought all this upon my poor child—I, it was, who suggested the idea to her imagination—who buoyed up her hopes from the very first. Alas! alas! with the best intentions I am always unfortunate—I have ever been my children's worst enemy!" and Mrs. Cameron wept the bitterest tears.

"Say not so, Mother!" Alick interposed, taking her hand affectionately; for he, as all her children, loved his mother tenderly, and could not bear to blame her in any way; although his cool, good judgment might have suggested that she often acted injudiciously, in forcing the idea of lovers upon the minds of her young daughters. "I think," he continued, "that in this case his Lordship is alone to blame," and his voice and countenance became stern.

"But, my dear Alick, I know if you take any step in this business you will do it

prudently," Mrs. Cameron suggested with some anxiety—"I am so thankful your father is not here—he is so hot and hasty when roused, and would only make matters worse. Lord Alfred is an honourable man I am sure; a few quiet words will I am certain recall him to a sense of what is due to Janet—due to himself as a true gentleman."

Alick did not reply to this, but after a moment's thought rose to leave the room.

"Alick, what are you going to do?" Mrs. Cameron called after him timorously as he was departing.

"Oh! nothing this moment; I am only going to speak to Annie," and he departed.

"Yes, I must speak to Annie," the brother thought; "if my suspicions prove groundless, the baseness will be even less inexcusable—a more clear light will be at any rate thrown upon the subject." Alick proceeded to the door of a large upper room occupied by his sister Annie, and gently knocking, entered.

No light was in the apartment but that of the moon, which streamed in, in clear and solitary brightness, revealing the figure of Annie seated near the window. Her hands were clasped upon her knees—her head slightly thrown back—her face, which was so pale, bore traces of weeping, as did the dark, earnest eyes raised as if to pierce the fleeting moonlit clouds. But the tears had passed away, and in their place a calm, divine expression had settled on her melancholy brow; and the peace which passeth all understanding seemed to breathe from her whole countenance.

So absorbed did she appear that the brother's signal and entrance had not been heard, and he had time to contemplate her thus—struck with a feeling almost approaching to awe at the calm holiness of the picture—ere she perceived his presence—

"Annie, may I come and speak to you?" he asked, in a tone accordant with the feelings with which he was inspired. By a faint but affectionate smile she acquiesced, and motioned him to approach her.

Alick sat down by her side—his heart turning with repugnance, as if it were sacrilege indeed to speak to her what he had come to say. But he could not fall back now, so he began—

"Annie, you will forgive me, I am sure, for thus troubling you—but poor Janet's case admits of no temporizing. She is in a most wretched state at this moment. I cannot suffer the matter to rest here—I cannot allow my sister's feelings to be thus trifled with—no! certainly not with impunity—But," an expression of poignant distress deepened more and more on Annie's face as she listened, "but,"

he continued, "since a faint suspicion has been excited in my mind that you might be able to throw some light on the subject of Lord Alfred's unwarrantable caprice, I thought—"

"Yes, yes, Alick," Annie interrupted with pale, quivering lips, "it is too true, I am, alas! the innocent—most innocent and reluctant cause of Janet's misery—or rather of Lord Alfred's most cruel—most unjustifiable conduct towards her."

The calm was now broken, and poor Annie burst into a passion of tears—her whole frame trembling with agitation. Alick kindly—soothingly took her hand, but words failed him wherewith to offer consolation in so peculiar and delicate a cause of emotion.

"Yes, Alick, I—even I," she continued in a tone of thrilling pathos; "yes, he spoke to me of love—to me"—and she raised her sorrowful eyes to her brother's face,—“he dared to think that I might listen favourably—that my heart might respond to his suit—my heart! or he could not so wantonly have done despite to my feelings—mocked me with words which jarred to my very heart-strings with agony—it seems to me sacrilege to have even heard them breathed. Because I cease to importune others with my sorrow, can they believe that it has passed from me?—do they suppose he is forgotten—*forgotten*? My Frank, my beloved, my lamented, my only love, are you not in memory ever by my side—do I not commune with you unceasingly in spirit?—ever present—ever my first—my last—my only thought?—*My heart!* it is buried far away in his grave—its every feeling blighted for ever! his dying gaze fixes itself as it were upon me, when the impious thought suggests itself, as it has been forced upon my imagination this evening—so soon too—it seems but yesterday—Alick, dear brother, if you could but read my feelings!" and she laid her head on her brother's shoulder and wept like a very child.

He soothed her with the tenderest sympathy and compassion, and she was calmed at last in a degree; her unselfish spirit turned speedily from herself—to the suffering Janet. And she expressed to Alick, as though she had really been guilty, the utmost contrition and grief at having been the unlucky cause of the poor girl's misery—but she added,

"Alick, I could however almost rejoice that she has discovered his deceit in time, for what he felt for her never could have deserved the name of love, or how—how could it thus have so turned? Far better at once to have the fairy fabric cast down, than find it desolate at last! Dear Alick, never let her know how unworthily he has acted; she is young and courageous in

spirits—let him go, we will cheer her—we will make her happy, the cloud will pass away, Alick, and the unworthy one will be forgotten."

"You are quite right, dear Annie, let us hope that so it may be, but—" and he suddenly rose with quiet determination, "I will leave you now."

"But one favour, dear Alick, let me crave, nay, entreat of you," she said, detaining him, "let what I have told you be forgotten—never mention it to any one; let them not know the torture inflicted this evening on their poor Annie's feelings: I was wrong perhaps to repeat what has transpired even to you—I beseech you, Alick, never reveal the unfortunate business to my parents—it would be a useless communication, only distressing to their feelings—and Janet, poor Janet, let her not know how innocently her sister Annie has proved her enemy!"

CHAPTER XLI.

"They seem to pity the lady; it seems her affections have their full vent. Love me! why, it must be requited. I hear how I am censured."

Happy are they that hear their detractions, and can put them to mending. They say the lady is fair; 'tis a truth I can bear them witness: and wise, but for loving me!"

Much Ado About Nothing

ALICK had soon after left the house, and before proceeding many paces came suddenly upon Lord Alfred, who was slowly walking up and down the esplanade in the moonlight.

"Ah, Cameron, is that you?" he exclaimed, in his usual manner, "a beautiful night, is it not?"

"Very, Lord Alfred!" Alick answered coldly; "I did not come, however, to enjoy its beauties, but to seek a few moments' conversation with you."

Lord Alfred bowed.

"It is a delicate subject to discuss, my lord, and most painful is it to my feelings to have to tell one I had hitherto regarded as a friend of my family, that I think his conduct to one member of it, unworthy the man of honour he has hitherto been considered."

"And equally painful to his feelings to hear," Lord Alfred replied quietly, removing the cigar from his mouth. "Do you allude to the step, I was perhaps too presumptuously betrayed into this evening, with regard to Mrs. Mildmay?"

"No, I do not—that is a matter in which I have no right or title to interfere. But with regard to another sister—your conscience must tell you, without putting me to the humiliation of entering into particulars—that as a brother, I cannot stand quietly by and allow her feelings to be so

wantonly trifled with, or trampled on—as they have been by you.”

“Certainly not, Mr. Cameron,” Lord Alfred replied with the most patient consideration, but with his eyes bent upon his companion with a slight assumption of surprise. “I am the last person to allow such an accusation, and the very first to wish to redeem my character from a charge so heinous as you have levelled against it; I can but conclude that you refer to Miss Janet Cameron.”

“I do,” Alick answered haughtily. “But don’t suppose my intention in thus addressing you is to plead in her behalf. No! that can be no longer at all desirable—of course nothing is expected of your lordship with regard to my sister—no satisfaction but that which I may demand of you, as her brother—”

“My dear Cameron—softly, pray—give me fair play—let me see my way a little before me. Has your sister Janet been made aware of the unlucky step taken by me with regard to—” and a sigh involuntarily escaped him, “to Mrs. Mildmay?”

“She has not—my sister Annie has breathed the circumstance to no ear but mine—nor does she wish it to be revealed to any other—that it may be buried in oblivion is her earnest desire.”

“And Janet loves me!” the words were spoken musingly and seriously—but they sounded like cool impertinence to the brother’s tenacious ears, and he said in an incensed tone—

“My lord, you add insult to injury.”

“Innocently, then, I am sure. It is generally deemed prudent to ascertain the real state of a young lady’s feelings before any serious step is taken,” Lord Alfred remarked.

“And can you pretend, Lord Alfred, to have had any doubts upon that point for many a day? Have you given no reason for her friends and herself to entertain, till very lately, perhaps, everything to a certainty as to the serious nature of your intentions?”

“Excuses are idle and cowardly, Cameron,” Lord Alfred answered, with the mildest *sang froid*. “I will not stoop to make use of them—but I am ready to offer better satisfaction for my sins. Miss Cameron shall hear from me.”

“Miss Cameron, my lord?” Alick replied proudly.

“And why not Miss Cameron? Mrs. Cameron it shall be then, if you prefer it; but the fountain head at once I best prefer. Nay, my good fellow,” he continued, seeing Alick looking still chafed and angry, with some objection hanging on his lip—“If it is for your own satisfaction rather than your sister’s—or mother’s,” he

added, with a slight stress of satire on the latter word, “that you particularly wish for an expedition on the downs with me to-morrow, I will not disappoint you of the pleasure—but really I feel much more inclined to throw myself upon the tender mercies of your lovely sister, than your worthy self, and I think on cooler deliberation you will also be of opinion, that to all parties it will prove the wisest and most agreeable course of proceeding.”

His manner was kind and conciliatory as he spoke these last words, and Alick, though he still wore a grave and uncertain expression, was silenced for a moment—but at length he said,

“What am I to understand then, Lord Alfred?”

“That it is my intention to write a proposal to your sister Janet—I shall leave Worthling all the same. After my mistake,” he added, and a tone of bitterness was in his voice as he uttered the last words, “I shall not presume to wait, as a matter of course, for a summons from your sister, but in London shall look for her sentence.”

“But, Lord Alfred, in what spirit, may I ask, is this act so abruptly decided upon?” the brother demanded.

“In a spirit with which, I trust, you can find no fault, Cameron. No, rest assured,” and his manner was courteous in the extreme, “there is nothing in the world now which can give me greater happiness than to make your sister Janet my wife.”

“But, Mother, are we justified in allowing her to accept this man under such circumstances?”

These were Alick’s words to Mrs. Cameron on his return home that night after having told her all—even Annie’s disclosure, as he deemed it but right to do.

“Can we be justified,” replied the mother, “in uselessly dashing to the ground the cup of happiness when offered to her lips? Pray, Alick, let it be as Annie desires—let these untoward circumstances with which she is connected be buried in oblivion—let Janet be happy in ignorance—let matters take their course. It would be useless—wicked to interrupt it.”

“Mamma, mamma!” cried a voice of trembling rapture at Mrs. Cameron’s door, the following morning, and Janet stood before her with a face glowing with bewildered ecstasy; then eagerly holding out the letter she had in her hand, burst into a paroxysm of tears.

“Oh, dear Mamma, this is too much to bear—such a sudden change from despair to the summit of happiness! Oh, how I have wronged him—how impatient, how hasty I have been! I am ashamed—I am disgusted with myself—oh, mother,

you were right—you told me it would be all well at last, and I wouldn't believe you!"

Mrs. Cameron read the letter, and attempted to express the unmixed pleasure and surprise expected from her.

Never letter of proposal showed better taste; and, as it appeared, better feeling, than the one before her. There was nothing forced or exaggerated to revolt the feelings of those behind the scenes, but simple, though graceful style—a manly earnestness of expression breathed throughout.

"Let me go to Annie, now, mamma—dear Annie! she must not be kept any longer in ignorance of my happiness!"

But Annie listened with pale, bewildered surprise to the communication of the happy girl; nor scarcely could believe it until she had seen and read the words which assured her that the love proffered to her not four-and-twenty hours before, was now cast at the feet of her unconscious sister, and received by her as the pearl of *great price*—the crown-jewel of her young enthusiastic hopes—as the offering of a heart whose rich depths had been stirred by her alone—its treasure offered but for her!

It was not, however, for Annie to open her sister's eyes, and blight her fair prospects by a revelation of that which she was more than ever tempted to persuade herself, must have been but a moment's madness on the part of Lord Alfred; that, too, which those in the secret, seemed so easily tempted to overlook.

Yet could she not but be troubled in spirit for the happiness of the dearly loved young being, who, in such firm confidence, cast all her most precious hopes upon a shrine which she, who so well knew how blessed a possession was a faithful heart, could not look upon without fear and trembling.

It was Mrs. Cameron who replied to Lord Alfred's letter, and there was a tone of dignity, almost of coldness, pervading the wording of the letter, wherein she declared that her daughter's feelings were inclined towards Lord Alfred's flattering proposal, which could not conceal from his perception, that the mother was not in ignorance of the circumstances attendant on his suit.

However, such an understanding was established between them that they met again with the warmth and unconstrained cordiality which assured his Lordship that it was, at any rate, Mrs. Cameron's desire to bury the past in oblivion.

The meeting took place at the Duke of Stratheden's seat, in ———, to which Janet was invited, accompanied by her mother, for the purpose of receiving her accepted lover.

The General there found his wife and daughter, his consent having been given, with kind resignation rather than cheerful pleasure, to an event he had for some time been led to contemplate as a dire necessity. His wife had long assured him of Janet's unalterable attachment to Lord Alfred, and the young girl, with burning blushes, and faltering tongue, herself confirmed the statement. He could have wished that her heart had anchored on a surer, safer rock, than a man of fashion; but the world spoke well of Lord Alfred, and the General knew by experience, that he was capable of warm and kindly affection.

And so, perhaps with less of faint-heartedness, though no less of tender earnestness, he bade a third daughter go and prosper on the adventurous paths of matrimonial life. And never did that critical interval on which the betrothed ones had now entered—the time between the betrothal and the wedding—glide on with smoother promise than on this occasion.

Scarce a passing gale ruffled the placid tide which bore them on to the day which sealed their fate.

Lord Alfred was a most courteous—nay, tender lover—more serious and subdued in his manner towards his bride elect than had been his wont before the declaration—but this spoke more to Janet's heart of the earnest affection of her "beloved one."

On her part she was the most amiable and charming bride elect that ever man possessed. Splendid gifts were showered upon her by Lord Alfred—generous settlements were drawn up—the happy day fixed—and another November wedding party issued from the hospitable mansion of the Strathedens.

CHAPTER XLII.

"Be a butterfly then! be the wildest and worst
Of the insects that flutter life's summer away;
Fly from bower to bower, as if thou wert nard
For no end upon earth but to trifle and play."

HAYNES HAYLET.

"CAN you tell me who those are?" was the inquiry of not a few amongst the guests present at a ball given by an aristocratic entertainer the following season, concerning two fair ladies of the company, who had made their appearance at ——— House together.

The answer was—

"Do you not know? The tall one with diamonds is Lady Alfred Townshend—a Cameron she was. Handsome, is she not? so fresh and unaffected as yet—so simple and unworldly! I wonder how Townshend managed to make so amiable a choice."

"But the other," persisted the inquirer,

"I want to know who she is—that wild, shy-looking little creature—all eyes, like an untamed antelope—and who seems to know or to be known by no one."

"Oh, I believe that is a brother's wife. Do you not remember? one of that dreadful Lady Rachel Beauchamp's daughters, eloped from the school-room with young Cameron—well, that is her."

And so it was, Agnes Cameron, who, under the auspices of her sister-in-law, made her first *début* in the fashionable circles of the gay world. And thus it had come to pass. Lord Alfred Townshend—unlike the former son-in-law, Mr. Beauchamp—not only established his wife in one of the most commodious and well appointed mansions in London, but with graceful kindness gave her to understand that she was at liberty to receive her relations whenever she so desired.

"In short, my dear Janet, I trust you will consider yourself the perfect mistress of your house, especially on this point, which concerns those whom I shall feel ever gratified in seeing under your roof; for truly I owe them a large debt of hospitality and kindness. The General, of course, will make this house his headquarters whenever he is in London—and your mother—pray make her come directly—I am sure you will want her to superintend your *toilette* for the drawing-room next month. What can she do with herself without a fair daughter to take out? what a lack of occupation she must feel!"

How kind, how grateful did this appear to the young wife! How different from the first son-in-law her parents had the ill fortune to obtain!

Janet lost no time in carrying out the gracious permission, but Mrs. Cameron could not stay long with her daughter. A plan had been formed for them to spend the summer on the Continent, accompanied by Annie and her child. So the young Lady Alfred—the guileless, happy girl, was left to thread her inexperienced way through the glaring and giddy paths of the ensnaring, heartless world.

However, Lord Alfred's kind permission that his house might be servicable to his wife's relations, was not disregarded.

Gerald happened to call upon his sister and told her that he was on the search for a house at Hampton-Court, where his present regiment—for he had exchanged into the — Hussars—was quartered, in which to establish Agnes and her children; a son having been added to his little family, and Janet, finding he had some difficulty in settling the matter, begged he would bring Agnes and the babies to Stanhope-street, and so it was arranged. Agnes eagerly snatched at the proposal; she would leave little Geraldine at the rectory with her Uncle Ralph and Aunt

Rachel, the baby alone need accompany her. She had arrived therefore in high glee, without delay.

"I suppose I shall have the pleasure of seeing you at S—— House to-night, Mrs. Gerald Cameron?" Lord Alfred had said, with his graceful courtesy, ere he prepared to dress for a dinner party.

"I—why? Is Janet going?" Agnes exclaimed, eagerly.

"I believe so; you intend to go, do you not, Janet?" his lordship inquired of his lady, who was talking to Gerald.

"Yes, that was my intention," she answered, "when Agnes goes to bed, which I imagine she will be glad to do early, after her journey."

"To bed! that is a slow way of disposing of your guest indeed—I see by her face she is far from approving of this plan," Lord Alfred answered, laughingly.

Agnes's countenance had certainly fallen piteously at the suggestion of her sister-in-law.

"Could you not prevail on her to accompany you to-night? Cameron, you will escort the ladies, will you not? I shall be late, I fear."

"Oh, how charming! Can I go? How shall I procure an invitation?" Agnes exclaimed, kindling again at the bright idea.

"Oh, that is easily settled. Janet can write a line; Lord — will be delighted to see you."

"That will be delicious! Will you write, Janet?"

Janet smiled and acquiesced. But Gerald interrupted the conference, saying, in a tone of mockery—

"Why, you do not mean to say, Agnes, that you seriously contemplate going to Lord —'s to-night?"

"To be sure I do, why not?" she answered.

"Nonsense, what an idea!" exclaimed the husband.

"That is just like you, Gerald; if there is anything pleasant to be done, you are sure to put a spoke in the wheel. Janet, are you ever ordered like a baby to do this and not to do that, as I am continually?" retorted Agnes.

Janet laughed—but sighed too, as she glanced at her husband, who looked much amused.

"But I don't care," Agnes added, "if I can go, I will."

"Can you accompany us, Gerald?" Janet inquired.

"No, I am obliged to be at Hampton-Court to-night. But Agnes cannot think of going; she is not prepared in the way of *toilette* for such a fashionable affair."

"Well, Mrs. Gerald, go on and conquer. I shall expect a waltz with you to-night," said Lord Alfred, gaily, as his cab being announced, he departed.

Janet followed him, with a choice sprig she had severed from her splendid bouquet, and which he had left forgotten on the table.

"Ah, this is the way you value my gifts!" she said, in a tone of fond reproach, looking up into his face with a smile of affection in which a slight tinge of timid anxiety might have been discerned, as she adjusted the flower in his coat.

"Thank you, Janet!" he said kindly, "you had better take Agnes with you to-night; write a note to Lord H——."

Meanwhile the discussion continued between Gerald and his wife, which ended in its being decided that Agnes should appear at —— House with her sister-in-law.

"Pray, Janet, see that Agnes is properly turned out to-night; I cannot admire, or trust to her taste in dress at all times," said Gerald.

Janet promised that her maid should superintend her sister-in-law's toilette; and the husband lingered to the last to see his wife equipped.

"Well! I hope you think I look respectable," she said, dancing in before him with a self-complacent air.

"Yes! thanks I suppose to Janet and her maid, you look less in the Madge Wildfire style than usual. Will she do, Janet?"

"Oh, yes!" her sister answered, "she will do beautifully now."

For great trouble Janet and her abigail had had, to keep the fair lady from over-indulging her propensity in the way of decoration—taste and fashion being nothing in her eyes in comparison with what she deemed becoming or smart; even now, with all their care, there was a touch of originality not to be restrained, which, however, gave rather a piquant character to her appearance, and did not strike the eye unpleasantly.

"And the baby?" Gerald continued, "you who used to declare you could not leave it for an hour together at night, for fear it might have a fit or something of the sort!"

"Oh, he will do very well, precious boy!" replied Agnes; "good bye, dear Gerald, I wish you could come with us, I shall be so shy without you."

"Yes, I dare say," Gerald answered, with quiet, playful satire; but he did not feel quite comfortable as he saw his giddy wife let loose, as it were like a wild bird, amidst the glittering snares of the fashionable world—away from his protecting eye.

Agnes, when once she had drawn upon herself the attention of the elite who crowded the brilliant assembly, was not long in becoming an object of much attention and amusement to many a gay parti-

ner, and she mingled in the dance with the most exhilarating zest.

Janet also danced, but in a very different spirit; quite willingly would she have relinquished a pursuit, in her unmarried days she had so much enjoyed, but which with her matron's state, had brought indifference. But it had seemed a matter of course that she should continue it. Her husband danced as much as ever, and with apparently undimmed enjoyment, and only desired that she would please herself in the matter.

She would have been more content perhaps if for *his* pleasure she had been required to give it up, but as it was not so, she felt no gratification in the sacrifice, and yielded to the stream of circumstances.

Her dancing had always been much admired, and she found it easier now to continue to dance than to refuse; but she could not but wonder at the almost childish *con amore* style with which she beheld Agnes, the wife of nearly five years' standing, and a mother withal, rush into the frivolous pursuit, her husband away, too, whilst she felt, when parted from Lord Alfred, like some bird severed from its mate, with a restless, unsatisfied wandering of heart, which prevented any peaceful enjoyment of aught around her. And yet already her eyes were becoming opened to the fact that to this she must learn to accustom herself in a world whose rules were regulated by fashion—not affection: and then, when her husband was with her in this same cold world, what was that strange barrier seeming to interpose between them, and render his presence even more a pain than a pleasure!

Agnes's wild career in the course of that night of her London debut met with one check; she was tripping lightly along, leaning on the arm of a partner in the waltz, when she suddenly came closely in contact with a high and mighty looking personage, before whom the crowd arrested the progress of herself and companion.

Agnes's roving eyes, wandering here and there, and everywhere, with wildfire glancing, fixed themselves upon her and became as it were fascinated in a moment; like a bird before a rattlesnake. Never was there such a change as that which for the first moment, the sight caused in the bright countenance of the joyous creature. All the terrors of her youth and childhood must have returned to her soul, for Agnes cowered—shrank like a blighted flower before her mother—the bugbear of her early days!

Nor did the sparks of very early feelings of a better nature show themselves quite extinguished in the timid, beseeching

glance with which the daughter's eyes, after having at length recovered from the first fascination, raised themselves once more. There spoke in their expression a something which might have told that the tie of blood

"Which wrong nor wrath of deadliest mood
Its magic may o'erpower."

had moved her heart towards the unloved parent before her.

But it was but for a moment. Finding not the faintest sign of return in that cold, harsh eye, bent in careless scorn upon her, the rising tears soon rushed back into their fount, transforming, as it seemed, the daughter's feeling, in a moment into passions as proud and unlovely. Dropping a low ceremonious courtesy—one which in its perfect acting was worthy of Madame Vestris's best performances—a mockery as it were of those formal obeisances exacted by Lady Rachel from her daughters, Agnes cast upon her mother a glance of bold, almost insulting carelessness, and turned to talk and laugh with marked lightness and levity to her companion, during the moment her progress was intercepted. It was not, however, before she had heard the question asked of Lady Rachel by a stranger—

"Who is that young lady?" and the answer was in a tone of scornful significance—

"Who? *that person?* I know her not."

On her return home in the full flush and excitement of her bright revelry, Agnes was inwardly reproached for her dissipation, by finding her baby lying awake, and crying for its parent nurse, for whom the little fellow had as yet not learnt to cry in vain.

It was no uninteresting sight to see the young mother seated in her ball-room finery, bending in anxious eagerness over the fair infant in her arms.

Janet stood and looked upon her sister, her heart yearning with a desire—a hope—kindled by the sight she now beheld.

"How strange it must be to you to be separated from your little girl!" she at length observed, after having listened for some time with a smile to the fond exaggerated epithets of tenderness Agnes was heaping on her nursing.

Agnes started.

"Good gracious! yes—strange, indeed, my precious—precious Geraldine! and I have not left her before since she was born. Well! I never thought of it till this moment."

"Indeed!" said Janet, laughing. "It is a pity, then, that I reminded you of it."

"Yes! indeed," murmured the nurse, reproachfully. "To think, ma'am, of your leaving her, precious darling, and this sweet beauty! why, I declare he has been

crying his eyes out for the last two hours; such work I have not had with him since he was born, I declare."

"Well! Anne, and what is the use of a nurse, if you are to have no trouble with the children?" exclaimed her mistress, looking up sharply. "I believe you think it is my place to remain at home as nursery drudge, from morning till night, and from night till morning. I declare, I might as well keep no nurse at all. You are quite mistaken if you think I am always to be the same as in the country places in which we have lived. I should like to know what all the fine ladies' nurses do with their babies?"

"I am sure, ma'am, I don't know; but—"

"But, you shall learn, then," interrupted Mrs. Gerald; "for whilst I am in London I mean to go out everywhere—every day; do I not, Janet?"

Janet shook her head, but smiled.

"Yes, I do," continued Agnes. "Lord Alfred told me that the Academy ball would be a failure to-morrow without me. Lord H. said that he would give up his ball if I did not go to it; so, Mrs. Anne, you must make up your mind to learn how to keep a baby quiet; and not grumble when I return, as if I were a hired nurse, and you mistress at large. As for Geraldine, if I choose to leave her at the Rectory it's no business of yours, so hold your tongue. And now put this precious darling of an angel into bed, and come and undress me; my head begins to ache. Good night, dear Janet; I shall never sleep after that enchanting ball."

CHAPTER XLIII.

Indifference! dreaded power!

TIGHE.

GERALD was on rather strict duty at this time; but at every possible opportunity he was in town to look after his wife, though seldom able to be of the party in any of the evening amusements for which he found her constantly engaged.

"Agnes, I don't think it right, your going out into society so much without me," he had suggested.

"What, with your sister—with Lady Alfred Townshend?" was Agnes's rejoinder.

"My sister is too young to be any very efficient chaperone; being Lady Alfred Townshend is nothing to the purpose," Gerald remarked.

"Chaperone! what in the world is the use of being married, if one require being chaperoned? and why should I want a chaperone more than Janet herself, pray?

Not so much—for I am older!" Agnes exclaimed, angrily.

"Nonsense! Janet, you know, mixes in society with her husband; and is better known than you are."

"And pray, why should I not make myself known as well? I have just as much right to be received in high society as your sister, I beg leave to say; but, Gerald, the fact is, you are like the dog in the manger—and because you cannot enjoy yourself in the same way just now, you would like me to shut myself up in Janet's back drawing-room, or in the nursery with the baby, though you have done nothing but grumble that I was never out of it—or I verily believe you are jealous. Well, you may well be so, sir; you have no idea how I am admired—yes, you may well stare, husband mine; you may think me a fright. But I'll tell you what," she continued, breaking off suddenly, and changing her tone, as she saw Gerald's patience beginning to wear out—"I have never seen one man yet as handsome as you; and, upon my word, I should be jealous if you were to be much at these balls and parties."

"Well, Agnes, behave well, or I shall begin to give you cause for jealousy," Gerald said, laughingly.

"To tell you the truth," Agnes continued, "I think this London is a very bad place for husbands; why, they are never at home—you talk of Janet having her husband to give her respectability, but truly he is seldom in the same room with her for many minutes together at Balls; and when there, seems to pay her as little attention, or rather less than if she were Lady Anybody else."

"Indeed," said Gerald gravely, "I am sorry to hear it; but these fashionable husbands——"

"Oh, now you need not think I meant to stick a feather in your cap by this reflection on Lord Alfred's conjugal behaviour—I assure you I think him a charming husband in many respects—I never heard him say a rude or cross word to his wife—she is to do just as she pleases—They have never once had a dispute, Janet says, since they married—true, that is only five months ago; but I am sure you and I had quarrelled before one had passed. However, Gerald, I must confess I should be most disgusted if you were not at my service in society whenever I required it; oh, I should be dreadfully jealous."

"Well, I hope in another week to have you settled at Hampton Court, in the prettiest little villa in the world."

"Oh, thank you!" replied Agnes, in a tone of very visible distaste; her eyes drooping, and her lips compressed; "how very charming that will be!"

"Very," Gerald answered slyly; "and

we will have Rachel and Gerry with us. I shall bring Rachel and you to London for a little gaiety, now and then."

"A little gaiety!" echoed Agnes, mockingly; "why, what an old grig you have become, Gerald! just like Lionel, I declare. Oh, that reminds me, You have no idea what fun it is to be able to flit about under Lady Rachel's very nose—and let her see my liberty."

"Well, pray let me see that you know how to use the liberty you are so fond of talking about."

"Oh, yes! I know how to use it."

"And to misuse it too, I fear," the husband retorted.

"Well, if that is your opinion, perhaps I had better verify it. No—no! I am only joking," she added, seeing Gerald's colour rise; "but you have become so sententious. I will be so proper—so demure. It is not any fault of mine if I am admired; and I can tell you so is Janet. There is one man desperately in love with her; she will not see it, of course; and was quite in a passion with me for mentioning it. I don't see any harm, I am sure; she is not obliged to return the affection; and the poor man cannot help himself."

As may be supposed, this thoughtless stream of rhetoric was not much calculated to increase the confidence with which the husband allowed his wife to follow the stream of circumstances which had led her into the gaieties of the metropolis. Nor was he perfectly satisfied in his mind as to the state of affairs within the mansion which sheltered her. The brother, so sensitively alive to all respecting his sisters, did not quite like that which reached his ears and met his eyes. He saw and heard enough to make him fear indeed that his sister Janet's fate was already showing itself, signed and sealed, as the wife of a fashionable *roué*.

He knew that many share the same fate in the world in which she had now become a member; that many—the young—the beautiful—the pure, loving not wisely, but too well, have yielded themselves recklessly to that fate, even though from the experience of others they may have learnt and been warned of the inevitable consequences of a union with an amiable, fascinating, but dissipated character. And there were many young creatures who, in the vortex into which they had plunged themselves, were soon moulded and hardened to the form and fashion of their fate; but this idea consoled not Gerald, on his sister's account. If such a portion were to be hers, he felt it was one which a Cameron was not formed to meet and to endure. He already seemed to mark a change upon her countenance; that startled look—that touching surprise with which the spirit of

the young wife is first assailed when the scales of confiding happiness are falling away; when she first sees that which she dreamt not of before. It was early in the day, indeed, for such a state of things, but so it surely was.

And Lord Alfred: had her parents been deceived in his character? What if he were, indeed, to prove the mere heartless, dissolute husband of the world? But nothing had transpired to destroy the impression, that though a man of the world, Lord Alfred was one more amiable than many; that under the influence of pure domestic affection, he was calculated to make the woman he loved, happy, as his wife.

"The woman he loved!" and did not Lord Alfred love Janet? Gerald had not been witness to the courtship, but from what he had heard, had imagined it to be an instance of true and earnest love. He had not been made cognisant of the latter features of the affair, and might indeed have asked—"Why did he marry and not love her?" Yet from the first time of beholding his sister and her husband together, there was something which damped his ideas of the ardent, all absorbing love of a husband of a few months' standing. Most kind, most courteous, most gentle were the manners of his Lordship towards his fond young wife; but Gerald clearly perceived the lack of a deeper feeling wherewith to satisfy the heart of his sister, who he could easily discover had set her heart with all the warm impulses of woman's young affections, on the husband of her pure and perfect love.

It was about the beginning of June, that Gerald called in Stanhope-street one afternoon, for the purpose of acquainting Agnes that after repeated delays, the house at Hampton Court was ready for her reception, and that it was his intention she should repair to it on the following day.

After seeing her settled therein, he purposed going to Sussex, to escort Rachel and the little girl.

Agnes, on hearing this, declared her determination to stay in London till after that latter step was taken. She was engaged, she said, to all sorts of things, and would not be boxed up at Hampton Court a day before it was necessary.

Gerald was firm, however, against the poutings and grumblings with which she resisted his tyranny, as she called it, all the way on their drive to the Nursery Gardens, to which Janet persuaded him to accompany them in the carriage.

Whispers had reached his ears, he liked not, and which had determined him that, except under his eye, Agnes should not be trusted abroad; that night he was able to accompany her to a great ball; Janet

even forbore to intercede now; even she was grave and unpitying.

Agnes perceived this, and resented it—

"Ah! I see Janet wishes to get rid of me. Well, I am sure I am ready to go; but really I wonder you are not glad of a companion, your husband making himself so fashionably scarce as he does; I am sure I wish *my* husband would be as little fond of my society, and then I might be able to enjoy a little more pleasure and liberty, as other women do."

How often do the light random words spoken in petulance rather than unfeeling levity, strike home, far more deeply than the speaker thinks or desires!

If Agnes could have seen all the sensitive soreness of those two hearts at which she levelled her careless words, she might have restrained her tongue; but she read not all the deep, pure, unselfish affection of her husband towards her unworthy self, in that conduct which she termed his harshness and tyranny; and as for poor Janet's feelings, little could she imagine that which she had never experienced; the agony of hearing embodied in words by another, the vague, excruciating idea, which was indeed torture to feel rising within the soul.

"As little fond of *my* society!"

The beautiful fairy lace parasol was brought low over the fair face to conceal the scalding tears which forced themselves from the azure eyes of Lady Alfred—nor was it raised till they arrived at the flower shop, and the bouquets were brought out for her selection. Gerald took one also from the man, and presenting it to Agnes, who had not deigned to rise from the corner of the carriage, in which she had sullenly thrown herself, said in a conciliatory manner—

"Well, I suppose I must give you one, though you do not deserve it!"

"Thank you—you may save yourself the trouble and expense. Pray," Agnes continued, bending forward towards the man, "has the *bouquet* for Mrs. Gerald Cameron been ordered as usual by Captain Trelawney?"

The man said he would inquire.

"Oh no, never mind, it is certain to have been ordered. I shall find it at home, no doubt;" and she sank back again in her corner with a most cool and consequential demeanour. Gerald compressed his lips, and tossed the *bouquet* back.

The carriage returned to the park, where, amidst the cavalcade, Lord Alfred was soon discerned, reigning in his fine horse to keep pace with the carriage by the side of which he rode.

He turned his eyes with an absence either real or assumed, upon the equipage of his wife, to which the lady, with whom he was conversing, rather than his own

observation, directed his attention, and he had passed on with scarcely a smile of recognition.

Gerald had scarcely looked at his lordship, his eye having fixed itself at first upon his fair companion, with whose appearance he had been instantaneously struck.

"Who is that lady to whom Townshend is talking?" he asked.

"A Mrs. Stevens," Janet answered, faintly.

"What an extraordinary likeness to Annie!" Gerald remarked.

"To be sure," exclaimed Agnes, forgetting her dignity for a moment. "Do you not know that is the reason Lord Alfred admires her so much—is it not, Janet?"

"I really do not know," poor Janet answered, turning away her head with some impatience.

"Why, you told me so yourself the other day—a poor compliment, I think, to admire a person for being your sister's likeness. If it had been because she was like you!"

"I do not wonder at Alfred admiring any one like Annie," Janet murmured humbly, "it shows better taste than if—" and a sigh checked her words. "But, dear Annie!" she continued, "it is but a poor compliment thinking her like that woman!" and there was a slight tone of acrimony in her voice. "How different, though so like!"

"Yes, she is far from being a desirable person to be like, if all I have heard is true," continued the unrelenting Agnes. "If I were you, Janet, I would not allow my husband to keep such company."

"Come, Agnes, you have talked enough nonsense," interposed her husband, impatiently; "Janet must be sick of you, I am sure."

"I have a headache," Janet murmured, turning very pale, as Gerald had perceived.

"She is dreadfully jealous of that Mrs. Stevens, that's the truth," Agnes said in a loud jesting tone, provoked that her drive should be shortened.

Poor Janet burst into tears.

Janet laid herself on a sofa and shut her eyes. She hated the glaring light, which so mockingly gilded the luxurious furniture of her pretty dressing-room. She closed her ears—she could not bear the noisy whirl of the carriages, the organs, and all the jarring medley of sounds without. She could have wished to die—or that Lord Alfred might return and find her dying, his love revive at the sight, and then her life be spared.

She wondered whether her poor sister Lena had ever been so miserable—no, her fate how far preferable to her own!—Oh,

to be teased, worried, killed with attention from her husband! And that Mrs. Stevens—why did Lord Alfred admire her so much?—She put out her hand and reached a picture of Annie which she had given her as a wedding present—It was one taken before Annie's marriage, for poor Frank Mildmay—and had only arrived that evening from the jeweller's, having been sent to be re-set—She gazed at it earnestly to discover the likeness which, by general consent, had been considered most striking, even in the days of Annie's London celebrity—She was startled from her occupation by the very unusual circumstance of Lord Alfred's entrance into her dressing-room at that time of day.

He said he had a dreadful headache, and requested Janet would give him some salvolatile, or something of that kind.

No smile of bitterness curled her lip as she rose with alacrity to attend to his request.

With trembling hands she poured out the draught, and approaching the table, near which he had languidly seated himself to await it, she perceived that the picture of her sister had attracted his notice, and that he was contemplating it with the most wrapt attention.

Janet's eyes keenly and nervously fixed themselves on the gazer's countenance.

He was very pale—that might be his headache—but then that half smile of tenderness and admiration that gave to his countenance a look of such feeling beauty—and its contrast to the cold, constrained, absent expression with which on perceiving her by his side, he raised his head, saying—"Oh, thank you, Janet," and took the cup from her hand and sipped the contents—his eyes again wandering to the picture!

Janet could not bear it any longer—she put forth her hand as if she would have taken the miniature away, then withdrew it. The action, however, caused Lord Alfred to look up, and he beheld a countenance of intense emotion, whilst her tall fair frame was thrilling as if with agony.

Lord Alfred looked the alarmed dismay, such sudden signs of feeling in another naturally excite, and said kindly—

"What is the matter, Janet?"

"Alfred, do not look thus at that picture—it—it kills me," she sobbed.

Lord Alfred looked surprised—nay, embarrassed, for one instant, and in a tone slightly annoyed and impatient—though he tried to laugh as he passed it from him—rising, he abruptly said,

"Nonsense! it's a capital likeness!"

"Of whom, Alfred?" Janet inquired emphatically, in the excited tone of one, buoyed up to the desperate determination of an *eclaircissement*.

"Why, my dear Janet, is it not intended

for your sister Annie?" Lord Alfred said, looking back from the window to which he had wandered.

"Yes—yes! but, Alfred, why should you look upon it as I saw you did just now—with such fond—such earnest admiration? Do you ever look on me—on my picture thus? I know I am not so beautiful; but, Alfred, I cannot bear that you should love—that you should admire any one but me. Ah, say you do not, Alfred—say so; I have not heard the sound for so long—never since we married, I believe. Say only that you love me, Alfred; for I begin to fear that you cannot—"

Lord Alfred turned his eyes coldly on her suppliant face as he said—

"My dear Janet, I hate scenes—they are my abomination; I thought you were wiser—too sensible to be the promoter of one. Why should you be jealous of my admiring your sister's picture?" he said, eyeing her with a penetrating look as he spoke.

"No—no, Alfred, not of dear Annie's picture; but—but, is it for her sake you look upon it thus—is it like no one else whom they say—I hear—I see you admire—Mrs. Stevens?"

"Ah!" interposed Lord Alfred, with a smile of some relief, "that's it. Yes, my dear Lady Alfred," he continued, in a lighter tone, "Mrs. Stevens is a pretty little woman, certainly—and there's a resemblance; but do not be alarmed—there's nothing there which need make you spoil your eyes, and worry yourself."

"But, Alfred, I am so very unhappy," she persisted.

"I am sorry to hear that, Janet; I have done all in my power to make you happy," he replied, relapsing into his tone of cold impatience; "what do you want?"

"Your love, Alfred," she murmured—"the love I flattered myself you once felt—without which all else in the world that you can bestow upon me is valueless."

"Janet, I have no romantic feelings belonging to me," Lord Alfred answered; "if romance is what you require, I am sorry you have raised your expectation so high, for—for —"

"You do not love me; you may as well say at once such is the case!" and poor Janet, pale with despair, clasped her hands like one on beholding some idolized treasure shattered at her feet.

For her husband's lips compressed as if refusing to speak the denial of the assertion, he cast his eyes to the ground, and his handsome countenance assumed an expression of moodiness foreign to its nature.

He was the first, however, to break the silence. He lifted his eyes and looked uneasily at the pale, woe-stricken girl before him, and then spoke kindly but gravely.

"Janet, I am sorry you have provoked this disagreeable affair; it is most injudicious and unworthy of the good sense I hoped my wife possessed; but for the future happiness and comfort of us both, I had better at once be candid, that you may know what henceforth to expect. I should never have made you my wife had I not seen enough in you to love and admire and respect to a degree, which might satisfy half the women you see around you."

"But not me!" Janet exclaimed. "I know not nor care for what will satisfy the heartless people around me; I know that I would rather leave you for ever, than live with you and not be loved as I hoped—as I have a right to be loved; for why—why did you marry me if you did not love me?"

"You are unwise, Janet, to talk thus, you draw upon yourself disagreeable results; press me not further, for—," and his eye inadvertently glanced at Annie's picture upon the table. "However, let all this be sufficient," he continued abruptly, changing his tone, "I hope to establish a good understanding between us, in order to prevent my being driven away entirely by such scenes as the one we have just enacted. It is time to dress for our dinner at —, I suppose; allow me to kiss that pale cheek, and let me see that it has recovered its bloom when we next meet."

"Oh Alfred, those light and careless words will not restore the colour to my cheek, no—" and she turned away with a shudder, "I built all my happiness on your love—the world was so bright and fair—you have plainly undeceived me now—you married me no doubt because you discovered the secret of my heart, and you pitied me; it was kind but most cruel; what shall I do—where shall I go?"

"Go, Janet?—this is too absurd!" Lord Alfred interposed, now really angry and annoyed. "Go? why, to bed I think would be at present the best place for you till you have recovered your senses—your temper I should say. I really had no idea that a daughter of Mrs. Cameron's could act thus foolishly," and with a displeased look he left the room.

CHAPTER XLIV.

Since that my beauty cannot please his eye,
I'll weep what's left away, and weeping die.
* * * * *
How many fond fools serve mad jealousy!
Comedy of Errors.

JANET did not go to bed; she was ready to accompany her husband to the dinner, where they were engaged together.

How little could strangers read, or understand all that was passing within her heart—how like poor Janet felt to some being of another sphere, beguiled as it were into the cold clime of the worldling by a spirit, with pinions of light—light now transformed into darkness which bewildered her and made her long for wings, that she might fly away in scared disappointment and regain her former state.

The school for wives out of which Lord Alfred had selected his wife was certainly little calculated to answer the expectations he appeared to have formed. There was too much depth of feeling indigenous in the Cameron family—too much devotion and purity of heart, and delicacy of sentiment, to render its daughters fit subjects for a world whose clime is ever at enmity with such feelings.

We have seen the gentle Lena shrink and die beneath the upas tree of selfish tyranny, to which she had been transplanted. Annie's affection rose not from the noxious dust of man's upstirring, but from the hand of her God. But here, in poor Janet, was another but too real victim; she, in whose glowing imagination and enthusiastic heart had been raised a passion only the more intense from its purity and unworldliness—a passion more likely to be strengthened than relaxed by time and further acquaintance with its object.

And till this present moment, Lord Alfred might have seemed to Janet a more perfect being than ever in point of amiability of character; for no look of unkindness, bitterness or harshness, nothing transgressing the strictest bounds of gentleness, consideration and kindness had ever jarred upon her heart or ear, or ruffled the subdued tenderness of her spirit, till this night, when she felt—she knew, it had been by her desperate importunity—she had wearied him into a departure from his equanimity. Yes, her husband was still in her devoted eyes the *beau idéal* of her heart and imagination.

But he did not love her—he had married her from pity—not from love—of that she was convinced, and this dread idea must strip her heart and fancy of their hope and glory for ever.

"The beginning of strife is as the letting out of water,"

says the wise man, and though strife may be too rude and broad a word to use in connexion with such persons as Lord Alfred and Janet, certainly a rapid stream of some kind must have risen from the scene we have recorded—for soon rumours were afloat of incompatibility of temper, prejudicial to the mutual happiness of the parties concerned, and grave surmises followed as to the result.

As evil news always flies fast, the

Camerons heard casually that which brought them immediately back to England; and the General and his wife proceeding straight to London, and then to Stanhope-street, found the house, to their dismay and astonishment, shut up, and learnt, from inquiry, that Lord Alfred was not in town, and that her Ladyship was at Hampton Court, with Captain Cameron.

Not any one of the maternal strokes which had fallen on Mrs. Cameron, came with such stunning force as the one which now assailed her. It was no subduing sorrow—no tender grief; but wounded pride, galling dismay, shame, humiliation; a mingling of all the bitterness and purest consequent on a trouble which the world's finger of scorn may be expected to point against yourself and those dearest to you.

Could the idle rumour, as she had till then persuaded herself it must be, be thus so decidedly, so unmistakeably verified? Had Janet already fled or fallen from that high and pleasant pinnacle of happy, cloudless greatness in which the mother had left her, in security, and a fulness of content almost palling to one whose occupation had been so long to wish and hope, and who had no present object remaining for such mental excitement—but *now*!

Having turned from the door of the deserted mansion in Stanhope-street, she drove, with the equally dismayed, but calmer General, with all speed, to Hampton Court.

There they found little calculated to minister relief or a diminution of their fears and distress; on the contrary, confusion was worse confounded, mystery being on the countenances of the domestics, by whom they were admitted; mystery on their tongues when they replied to the guarded inquiries for their master, or mistress, or Lady Alfred Townshend—mystery the parents interpreted as appertaining to the latter.

The General and Mrs. Cameron were told that Lady Alfred was in her room—that their master and mistress were from home, but that Miss Beauchamp was in the house; an announcement soon followed by the appearance of Rachel herself, pale, anxious, and harassed; little Geraldine holding by her dress.

"In the name of all that's dreadful, Rachel, what is all this about?"

"Good God! my dear Miss Beauchamp, how has all this happened?"

Such were the emphatic and earnest inquiries with which, having hurried her into a sitting-room, the parents severally accosted the scared-looking Rachel Beauchamp.

"Indeed, General—indeed, Mrs. Cameron," was the earnest and distressed rejoinder, "I am hardly able to give you any very clear idea of the meaning of any—"

thing that has happened; my brain has hardly yet recovered from the bewilderment into which it has been thrown. Poor Janet is here, I suppose, you know, and you will doubtless learn from her more than any one else has been able to extract concerning that strange, sad, most startling affair—but as for the other,” (and though Rachel raised her shoulders with a gesture almost of impatient disgust, in which something resembling the haughtiness of her mother was perceptible, pale agitation deepened on her countenance, and her voice was tremulous as if with inward emotion,) “I can tell you little else, as yet, but the painful fact which you have already heard.”

“Heard!” exclaimed Mrs. Cameron, with the most fearful impatience of suspense, “do you mean Lord Alfred? what in the name of—”

“No, no, not Lord Alfred—surely you have heard of Agnes?”

“No, indeed,” interposed the General with anxious haste, “of Agnes, what?”

Whilst Mrs. Cameron clasped her hands and raised her eyes in terror.

“She left home the day Gerald came into Sussex for me and this child. A despatch followed him with the information that she had not returned, or been heard of. We arrived here to find her still absent. Ralph has gone with Gerald to search for her. It is too dreadful, too infamous!” and Rachel’s firmness gave way, and she burst into tears.

Even Janet was forgotten for a few minutes, in the horror and dismay which this communication excited; but Janet soon recalled herself to the parents’ recollection, by appearing before them in *propria persona*—gliding in with a face very pale, and a dreamy, half-bewildered expression in her azure eye.

She sank into her father’s arms as he hastened to meet her, and trembled, rather than wept, in the fervent embrace in which he enclosed his precious child.

Rachel left them alone to solve that which was still dark to her; as Janet had held herself in timid reserve from any particular confidence on the subject of her mysterious troubles, and from the respectable maid who accompanied her lady from Stanhope-street, nothing transpired to afford any enlightenment. The woman had never heard anything like angry words pass between her Ladyship and Lord Alfred; he seemed very kind and courteous—she, affectionate and gentle. Her Ladyship’s spirits certainly had not been so good of late; she had found her in tears several times. Lady Alfred had given her orders to prepare to accompany her to Hampton Court, the very afternoon of the day on which a dinner party was to assemble in Stanhope-street, at which

Lord Alfred, she had since learnt, had been obliged to preside, giving out that his lady was indisposed, when, in fact, she had left his roof for her brother’s. His Lordship, she had also been informed, had been very much cut up, and had quitted London early the next morning.

The General and Mrs. Cameron were scarcely able to gain any more enlightenment from their daughter herself than this account threw upon the business. Janet seemed to shrink from any direct and explicit communication. She brought forward no accusation against her husband—indeed seemed to be far from easy in her conscience as to the blame which her share in the business might merit from her parents. To all their reasonings and questions nothing could they draw forth, but the hopeless, despairing information that she had bid adieu to Stanhope Street, not being able any longer to endure the wretchedness which had been daily increasing upon her for the last month; and when they proposed that she should return there with them, and thus silence the busy scandal of the world, for a moment, with a ray of something like revived hope, she would listen, but end by arguing despairingly that it was now too late—Lord Alfred would not desire it; the world, no doubt, had already set it down that they were parted—and so it must be now.”

“Where was Lord Alfred?” they asked.

She did not know—then wrung her hands, and wept in bitter anguish.

But even this weighty matter was but a secondary consideration in comparison with the other dreadful case. In this distressing mystery, there lingered some faint hope of its being righted and repaired—but for the other—shame, ruin, and disgrace must be the inevitable consequence of this wretched step taken by Agnes to all whom it concerned.

She had gone out on horseback the morning after Captain Cameron’s departure—and before Lady Alfred’s arrival, in company with Captain Trelawney, and never returned—this was what the servants had to relate; what inferences and conclusions could be thence drawn? Mrs. Gerald had evidently no intention, on setting out, to absent herself for the night, at least, for she had ordered her dinner, and appointed a tradesperson to come for orders in the evening. But, however the deed might have been done, whether perpetrated by impulse or design—she had certainly been for three days absent from her home and children, and that was quite sufficient to seal her doom.

CHAPTER XLV.

"Know, smiler! at thy peril art thou pleased;
Thy pleasure is the promise of thy pain."

YOUNG.

THE General was on the point of setting off to return to London to seek some tidings either of Lord Alfred or the pursuers of the unfortunate Agnes, when Ralph Beauchamp suddenly appeared.

His pale and deeply harassed countenance was scarcely calculated to administer any relief to the anxious hearts of those who greeted him, but his first words bore healing on their wings, for they were—"Thank God—thank God! for by His merciful and providential interference, she is saved, so far, from actual guilt, and the ruin she was on the brink of incurring. Let us pray Heaven that her life may be spared for her reformation—and that her character may be saved from further stigma than her folly has already drawn upon it."

Ralph Beauchamp then proceeded to detail facts which it may be as well to take into our own hands to relate—and for that purpose retrograde a little in our narrative.

From what met his eyes at the ball to which Gerald accompanied his wife the night before her removal to Hampton Court, he had been only more thoroughly convinced as to the propriety of withdrawing her from any further independent and unprotected dissipation, such as that in which she had already plunged; and it may be imagined that the ensuing conjugal *tête-à-tête* had not been of the most amiable and placid nature, for Gerald had even refused to allow Agnes to ride with a party of which Captain Trelawney was of course to be a member.

For some time Gerald had fixed upon the following day for running down to Sussex to bring back his little girl and Rachel, whose society for her sister he more than ever desired; but he now seemed scarcely inclined to put the plan into execution, hinting at substituting a servant as their escort.

But Agnes had tamed down into sudden, reasonable, and subdued meekness, as if an evil spirit had departed of which she had been possessed, and she was herself again. She declared her extreme anxiety to see her little Geraldine, and to have her with her—in fact, removed somewhat too rapidly all anxiety on her account from the heart of the guileless and unsuspecting Gerald, and sent him into Sussex with the most implicit confidence that his wife would scarcely leave the nursery—in the duties of which she seemed again absorbed—till his return.

And Agnes held the baby in her arms

until he was well out of sight, when she gave it to the nurse, equipped herself in her habit and feathered hat, and by the time that was accomplished, Captain Trelawney had arrived on horseback, and her own steed was brought round.

The pair soon rode forth together; Agnes gaily kissing her hand to the crowing baby, held up by its ill-approving nurse at a window above.

On they rode, laughing and talking. The day was hot, but there was a balmy breeze, and far from subdued in body and spirit, Agnes found herself in the gay confusion of the London streets.

Captain Trelawney said they must go to Gunter's to refresh themselves and give their horses rest. So to Gunter's they went, and Captain Trelawney left Agnes with her ices and cherry brandy to give some orders to his servant, and when in half an hour after he proposed that they should set forth again, she found her pal-frey substituted for another perfect lady's horse, and her delight and approbation rose still higher when she was informed by her companion that they were going to ride in the park.

"That was so delicious—such a perfect treat!"

She thought of Gerald indeed for a moment, and of not even having her own servant in attendance, besides the chance of meeting Janet, which might be awkward under such circumstances, and cause her expedition to reach her husband's ears some day or other. But she could not help it—she must go.

Captain Trelawney did not seem to dream of her refusing—so it would be silly to make objections so impossible to explain—*coute qui coute*—she must go.

And Agnes went, and mingled amidst the equestrians, the most careless of the careless, and gayest of the gay. Once or twice she asked in a tone of some alarm of her companion whether that were not the Townshend carriage she saw, but Captain Trelawney having repeatedly undeceived her on that point, at length said:

"I don't think you will see Lady Alfred out to-day; or if you do, from what I hear she must be too much absorbed in her own affairs—which they say are in a very critical state just now—to remark us."

Agnes cared or thought not to inquire the meaning of this.

In the course of the ride, Captain Trelawney mentioned a new piece which was then the rage at the Haymarket.

"How I should like to see it!" exclaimed Agnes.

"Well, why not to-night?" was her companion's immediate reply.

"Go to the play to-night—how could I possibly do such a thing?" Agnes laughingly continued. "And now," she added,

sighing, "I must go, I suppose, and look after my own horse—it is getting late."

It would be a distasteful task to enter into all the details of the discussion which ensued. Captain Trelawney was a hair-brained, foolish, thoughtless, reckless young man—as giddy and ill-regulated as Agnes herself. It was folly more than vice which actuated his present conduct—a self-willed impulse, which caused him madly to brave the consequences of leading this weak young creature into conduct, to say the least, most fearfully imprudent, and morally wrong.

It was arranged that Agnes should go to an hotel, frequented by the Cameron family, and where she was known, and that she should send for a dress awaiting her at the mantua-maker's, which had been prepared for an entertainment to which they had been invited a few days hence. Thus equipped—truly over-dressed for such an occasion—a gaudy shawl having been hastily procured from a neighbouring shop, she was soon driving in Captain Trelawney's Brougham, accompanied by that gentleman, to the Haymarket Theatre.

There, seated in a small private box, the excitement of the previous hours partially subsiding, vague dread, shame and perplexity began to pierce through her bewilderment, quieting and subduing her fevered spirit.

As to any enjoyment of the play, it was quite out of the question. Shrinking from being seen and recognised by any acquaintance, she sat ensconced behind the curtain, beyond the possibility of any view of the performance—the sounds only reaching her ears as senseless and jarring confusion, whilst Captain Trelawney talked with the same—or rather, as may be supposed, with increasing freedom and levity; and, however she might have before drawn it upon herself, her toleration of such conduct was really now more the effect of distress and uneasiness of mind, from which she was painfully suffering, than any real carelessness or approval. Whilst Agnes smiled forcedly, or spoke incoherently, her thoughts were uneasily wandering to her husband. What would he do or say if by any possibility he ever imagined her to have been in the situation she now found herself—if any part of that day's expedition ever reached his ears? Cold shudderings of terror, of conscience-stricken regret and repentance began to creep over her whole frame; she was pale and trembling. How should she be able to face the servants on her return home—how prevent the information from spreading through their gossiping? She might say indeed that she had been at Lady Alfred Townshend's. There was

some comfort in that thought, and she breathed for a moment more freely, then suddenly turning to Captain Trelawney, begged him to allow her to go—saying she could stay no longer—it would be so late before her return to Hampton Court.

Captain Trelawney rose at her command, and conducted her down stairs. On their way they met several acquaintances of the Captain, who spoke to him, and stared very openly at his fair companion, who shrunk with shame and humiliation from their gaze, whispering imploringly to her conductor to hasten on.

But they were not destined to leave the house so prosperously. We need not waste time by entering into the exact facts of the case—suffice it, that the hot Life-guardsmen was excited by some impertinent conduct of a member of the crowd through which they passed, and not even the remembrance of Agnes leaning on his arm could subdue his rage and moderate the violent language he was rash enough to use—language duly returned in the excitement which succeeded, and the terrified Agnes withdrew her arm from his.

Luckily, the quarrel had begun not very far from the door; and, pushing her way desperately through the press, she stood at length at freedom; and by her gesture more than by her voice, which she could hardly render articulate, made some cabmen understand that she wished for a conveyance—too well, indeed, for several at the same time rushed forward—and she was at length rudely pushed into one by the conquering hero, who, scarcely attending to her almost fainting directions to drive her to Hampton Court, dashed off at a furious drunken pace, followed by the angry vociferations of his vanquished compeers, and indeed by one or two themselves, who, having secured other customers, seemed determined to obtain revenge by putting the driver to the shame of being outrun in the race.

And Agnes soon felt the furious rate at which she was so fearfully rattling in the crazy vehicle increased to one still more terrific, and a shriek of horror issued from her lips when she felt the cab suddenly whirl round a corner and heave on one side. She knew no more. The next sensation she experienced was that of extreme pain and weakness, even unto death—as, opening her eyes, she faintly called upon the name of Gerald.

None but strange faces met her view—those of a doctor, and an old woman who stood by the side of the bed, or rather pallet, which stood in a small garret-like apartment.

Dim recollections dawned upon her brain as her glance caught the bright pink

and silver of the gaudy dress, carelessly thrown on a chair at the foot of her uncurtained couch.

The doctor stooped down and spoke—not too gently—whilst the old woman bent no pitying gaze upon her, but a stern impatient glance.

But Agnes was too confused clearly to comprehend the words addressed to her, or to answer with any degree of coherency. She only again faintly called forth the name of her husband—

"Gerald, dear Gerald!"

The next thing she could clearly realize was the crabbed, sharp voice of the woman in her ear.

"Come, come! I can have none of this nonsense—please to find sense enough to tell us of somebody belonging to you—or you must be off to the Hospital; I can't keep such as you in my house any longer. Come! where's your home—if you have one?"

"Home! home!" Agnes murmured, becoming again confused—"oh, do not send me home—she'll kill me!"

"Who—who?" asked the catechizer, harshly. "No doubt you deserve it richly."

"She—my mother—Lady Rachel—do not—oh, do not take me to her!"

The woman turned and spoke to the doctor, who again was there.

They returned to the questioning; but, except that she continued to cry for Gerald, and prayed against being given up to her mother—to Lady Rachel—nothing more satisfactory could be gained.

The doctor puzzled his head to think of any Lady Rachel he had ever heard of, but unsuccessfully; and argued therefore that no such person existed, and that it was all humbug the sick woman having a mother of title.

The old woman declared that if "her Gerald" did not come and find her out in a day's time, when she would have come round a little, she must be off to the Hospital; for she could not harbour the like of her any longer in her house, she was mad to have done so at all.

That same afternoon the anxiety of the old woman was allayed by the arrival of the respectable clerical brother at the lodgings, with eager inquiries if the lady who had met with the accident had not been received into that house.

On receiving confirmation from the landlady, Ralph Beauchamp demanded instantly to be conducted to his sister, which was done with many apologies for the inferior accommodation which, under the circumstances of the case, she had considered it but due to afford the lady.

Ralph was much affected by the state in which he found his sister—Her senses were by this time much cleared—but

from the bleeding to which she had been submitted, she was reduced to a state of weakness, so extreme, that though conscious of her situation, she had remained without strength to express or make known her desire, as to the friends that might be summoned to her aid. Distress and agony were painted on her small haggard face—her head was bound with bandages—whilst the large eyes of the unfortunate young creature fixed themselves with an almost frantic eagerness on the familiar countenance which now bent over her with sad, anxious solicitude.

The brother took her hand with trembling emotion, murmuring with a mixture of tender agitation, and grave, sorrowful reproach—

"Agnes, poor Agnes, how is all this? how could you bring yourself to this extremity?"

"Oh, Ralph, Ralph, forgive me!" her quivering lips found utterance to gasp. "Forgive me, for am I not dying?"

"Let us pray that so it may not be, Agnes; and at the same time let us supplicate from Him forgiveness, which living or dying you so greatly need."

Ralph Beauchamp lost no time in despatching a messenger for better advice, also a nurse, and every comfort to render her present sick-room more commodious; and his mind, a degree relieved by the opinion of the surgeon, as to his sister's condition, and having left her in confidence under the charge of the nurse, promising the invalid to return in the evening, he hastened to carry relief to those awaiting his intelligence with such agonizing suspense. The party at Hampton Court had not however been his first care. No! he had to seek the couch of poor Gerald, who now, in the lodgings of Captain Trelawney, the companion of Agnes's unbridled folly, lay in a most precarious condition.

The state of feeling to which the unhappy husband was excited, when the certainty beyond the possibility of doubt or hope appeared in all its hideousness, telling him that the wife he loved with all her faults, so truly, so madly, was lost to him for ever, may well be imagined; for we know that the spirit of the most cold and impenetrable of men yields like a reed, or maddens to frenzy, when the cords that bind him to a woman's delicate love are loosened or riven.

Inquiries at Stanhope-street having been fruitless, those at the Barracks for Captain Trelawney were answered by directing the inquirers to his lodgings. Thither the husband and brother repaired, and there successfully found themselves in face of the young officer, who in one minute had heard his accusation, and stepped back to escape the blow of fury

which was raised, in answer to a cool and haughty disavowal he was beginning to make. The next saw the raised arm of the incensed husband sink powerless by his side, and his whole form fell heavily to the ground, senseless before Ralph Beauchamp and the much dismayed and startled young Trelawney. A rush of blood issuing from Gerald's lips spoke the fearful explanation that some inward vessel must have given way, from the mighty shock of agitation by which his whole frame had been convulsed. He was laid on a bed and a medical man summoned, who verified their suspicion.

Captain Trelawney, with much confusion and agitation, requested to be allowed some explanation of circumstances, to which his conscience afforded but too true a clue; and on hearing the stern demand of the brother for information regarding Mrs. Gerald Cameron, he earnestly declared his utter ignorance concerning her movements—making a not unabashed avowal of their doings on the day she left Hampton Court in his company—his final separation from her at the door of the Haymarket; and though at the time that circumstance had given him much anxiety, he had quieted himself with the supposition of her having entered a carriage and returned to her home; he was on the point, he said, of riding to Hampton Court to ascertain her safety.

Ralph Beauchamp's feelings, as may be imagined, were but changed from the dread of a terrible certainty, to a confused agony of doubt and perplexity.

Captain Trelawney eagerly and anxiously proceeded with the brother in the search, on which, after having left the unfortunate Gerald under careful guardianship, they set forth.

The husband's senses were sufficiently returned to render it possible and necessary for the brother-in-law in some measure to make known the real circumstances of the case; which, however little comforting, seemed not unfraught with relief to the sufferer, as his countenance plainly testified as he faintly murmured "Thank God!" and motioned his brother-in-law away, as if to hasten the research upon which he knew he was about to set forth.

By the active assistance of the police, the deserted clue had been discovered, and the lost one traced, as we have seen, to her asylum by Ralph Beauchamp.

The Camerons lost no time in hastening to their suffering son; Captain Trelawney resigning his house to their sole occupation.

Jarlet was consigned to the care of Rachel and Annie Mildmay, the latter having been sent for from Dover, where she and the rest of the party had been left by

General and Mrs. Cameron on their arrival in England.

As for Lord Alfred, he had been as yet unheard of in Stanhope-street, but the papers had shown him to be amongst the passengers, who had sailed in the steamboat from Brighton to Dieppe the day after he had quitted town.

CHAPTER XLVI.

Not wholly lost the heart
Where that undying love hath part:
Not worthless all, though far and long
From home estranged, and guided wrong;
Yet may its depths by Heaven be stirr'd,
Its prayer for thee be pour'd and heard!

Mrs. HERMAN.

RALPH BEAUCHAMP, as he returned late that evening to the habitation which contained his imprudent sister, entered with the serious, earnest intention, and determination, that with the blessing of that God who can turn the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, he would endeavour that if the misguided Agnes ever rose from her bed of sickness, she might prove a sadder, perhaps, but a wiser being, than when first laid upon that couch of anguish.

He had rejected all proposals of friends or familiar attendants being sent to her; indeed, he had little difficulty in persuading the parents, absorbed in anxiety for their beloved son, to allow him to take into his own hands the care of their troublesome daughter-in-law, towards whom they could feel at this moment only disgust and severe displeasure; her conduct having thus brought her husband into such danger and distress. It might indeed seem a cruel time to choose wherein to "wring the heart of sin—" that time of sore bodily pain and weakness; but the spirit of firmness and decision, which, in its best or worst features, formed so strong a characteristic of the disposition of the Beauchamp family—with the exception indeed of its last frail, unstable scion, Agnes—enabled Ralph to discern, that if a reformation were to be effected upon the mental constitution of the subject now under his hands, it must be now, or most likely—never!

He braced himself therefore to the undertaking, determining that no morbid tenderness—no weak shrinking, should induce him to draw back his hand from probing to the uttermost those evil tendencies in his sister, which had hitherto proved the bane of all those who loved her. Yes, he decided that with the exception of himself—he who had ever proved more an object of awe than affection and confidence to the volatile Agnes—no indulgent friend or re-

lation—no kind familiar servant should approach her, to show, by their anxiety and pitying solicitude, that her offences might be soon forgotten and forgiven; and thus cause her contrite remorse to pass away—to evaporate as the morning dew, and with it all hope of ultimate amendment.

That night the brother spent by her bedside.

The medical man thought well of her condition, for the extreme exhaustion by which she was subdued, was the effect of the severe bleedings, by which her head had been relieved. But this weakness was to Agnes the feeling of approaching death, and as the morning dawned and she aroused from the dizzy state in which nearly all the night she had continued, she began to feel more sensibly her condition, and asked faintly, "Am I to die alone—will Gerald not come to me?"

"I am here—your brother Ralph, Agnes. You must be content, I fear, with my attendance—your husband is ill, I am sorry to say, as ill as yourself—suffering through the dreadful fear and suspense into which your conduct has plunged us all; his parents are of course with him, and cannot be expected to leave their son, for the wretched cause of his sufferings. Ah, Agnes! you have forfeited all right to demand the indulgent tenderness, the fond, anxious attendance of any of your husband's relations—ay, of your husband himself, had he been able to come; let us pray, that if it be the will of God, you may be spared to redeem at least your character, in their eyes, if not in those of the world in general."

The invalid was too weak to pronounce more than a few words of self-exculpation as to any real intention of evil on the fatal day of her accident. "Gerald," she faltered, "could not believe it; he must be ill, for he never would have forsaken her."

Ralph shook his head, sadly, and said no more that day; but the next, when Agnes's symptoms were all subsiding, and she again asked over and over again for Gerald, or even for any one of his family, he spoke gravely and decidedly on the subject. He talked of the much tried patience—the often betrayed confidence of her husband—the deceitful change of demeanour by which she had lulled his suspicions and induced him to depart from Hampton Court. What interpretation but one, could he even, the most trusting of men, have put upon her conduct? In short, her brother gave the subdued patient to understand that she must not hope or expect, in the present injured state of their feelings, that the relations of her husband would approach her; and indeed in the course of the conversation, Ralph broke to her the appalling intelligence,

that the parents had determined, in the event of their mutual recovery, to use their influence with Gerald to induce him, for the sake of his future peace and happiness, and the welfare of his children, to separate from a woman who, by her folly and levity alone, would bring disgrace and misery upon all those connected with her.

Agnes writhed like a crushed worm, at this announcement, and her pale lips murmured—

"Then let me die!"

"Agnes, are you prepared to die, and appear before a pure and holy God? Do you feel your sins forgiven—your offences blotted out? Pray, rather, not to die until you feel they are pardoned."

"Forgiven—pardoned!" she gasped, in much agitation. "No, if man reject me, how can I expect to be accepted by God? Where—where, then, shall I go? What will become of me?"

"Agnes, measure not God's mercy by that of your fellow creatures. The forsaken of father and mother—the alien and stranger from those nearest and dearest, God will take up, pity and comfort, if, in steadfast faith, despising all other hope of mercy and salvation, he turns to Him."

Ralph Beauchamp then knelt by the bedside and commenced that form of prayer, in beauty and force beyond the power of man's unassisted composition.

At first it seemed as if the words failed to enter the comprehension of her in whose behalf they rose. The large eyes, as if suddenly opened to discern a new and terrible world of doubt and dread, fixed themselves with an agonized and fearful, rather than attentive, gaze upon her brother's countenance. But the deep, earnest voice seemed at length to pierce her heart, as it prayed "that the sense of her weakness might add strength to her faith, and seriousness to her repentance—that if it were God's good pleasure to restore her to her former health, she might lead the residue of her life in His fear, and to His glory." A new light broke upon her countenance—her pale lips quivered—her feeble hands clasped themselves convulsively together—she listened breathlessly to the penetrating and impressive exhortation, following each word after the reader, and giving her faint, timid assent to the articles of belief.

Her brother paused; and as if at the regretted close of a strain of music, Agnes made a gesture of entreaty that he would proceed.

Ralph Beauchamp then told her that it was his duty to examine her as to the true nature of her repentance and charitable feelings towards the world—to exhort her to forgive from the bottom of her heart all persons who had offended her; if she had offended any, to ask their forgiveness;

and where she had done injury or wrong to any man, to make amends to the uttermost of her power, without which the forgiveness he was empowered to declare could not be accorded to her.

With touching, piteous earnestness of countenance, the expression of her early days returning, Agnes faintly gasped, "I have offended them all—all—I ask their forgiveness, tell them. But they will not come to hear me; I have injured *him*, you say—*him* whom I love so well; but then—how make amends?"

"The earnest desire will at present be sufficient, Agnes; the earnest, prayerful determination that if your life be spared and opportunity given, you will make amends by the future rectitude of your life, for all you have made your kind and tender husband suffer."

"Yes—yes! oh, Gerald, my own beloved, my darling Gerald, yes—yes!" she gasped with an earnest glow upon her pallid countenance, which spoke a depth and sincerity of purpose more than words could express.

"And your enemies, Agnes? we have spoken only of those from whom on your part you crave forgiveness; but are there none by whom you have been offended—are there none by whom you think yourself to have been injured, whom you cannot contemplate with that perfect charity which is required of you—are there none with whom, for the quieting of your conscience, you would wish to be reconciled?"

Agnes opened wide her eyes with an uneasy, frightened expression, as she gasped in trembling accents—

"My mother!"

"Would you see her then?" demanded Ralph, after a pause, in a tone of some emotion; for though it was not without purpose and expectation he had thus directed his questions, he could not but be affected by hearing a mother's name pronounced by a daughter on her sick-bed, as the enemy of her young existence.

"See her!" with a look of terror Agnes exclaimed. "She would not come if I wished it."

"Then you do *not* wish it?"

"Ah, it would kill me at once—her angry hating look!"

"But," continued Ralph, "could you leave this world in peace, if at enmity with your mother—without an endeavour, at least, on your part, to do away that enmity—to make known to her your willingness and desire to humble yourself and crave pardon for offences committed against her? I feel and know indeed too well all you can bring forward in your justification on that point; still I exhort you to make your peace, or endeavour so to do, with your earthly parent, ere you hope to be forgiven by your Heavenly

Father. Tranquillize yourself now—I will leave you with your nurse to take a little rest. May God bless you, preserve your life, and renew your strength."

It was in the silence and solitude of the night that, calling for her brother, Agnes with earnest entreaties begged that her mother might be sent for. She now felt she should have no peace till she had made known her desire for pardon—her wish to show her own perfect forgiveness.

"And, oh Ralph," she continued, "there is another—that wretched face of poor old Ricketts, how it has been haunting me, and it will follow me to the grave, if I do not ask also her forgiveness."

Lady Rachel Beauchamp had never re-entered the walls of the Towers, nor seen her eldest son since Lena's death—Mr. Beauchamp having written to her immediately after the funeral, requesting her henceforth to consider the house in Belgrave Square as her own, for it would be no longer convenient or expedient that they should live together.

In solitary grandeur then, cut off from all communication with any one of the children she had brought into the world—Lady Rachel remained till the day when a note was delivered to her from Ralph Beauchamp, and which opening, with indignant surprise she saw to contain an account of Agnes's illness, with the earnest request that her mother would visit her and comfort and relieve her heart by a reconciliation, or at least a few words of kindness and forgiveness, and that she would suffer Miss Ricketts to do the same."

"Here, Miss Ricketts!" cried her Ladyship, tossing the note to that person, who sat at a writing-table near, "be pleased to answer that effusion."

The ex-governess re-settled her spectacles on her nose with her shaking hands, which still however retained sufficient power of stiff, straight autography to render her an efficient amanuensis to her patroness—and then she began to cast her eyes over the epistle.

"Miss Agnes?—oh, dear me!"

"I will dictate immediately, if you please," interrupted Lady Rachel, and the paper was speedily prepared.

"Write in your name."

"I am desired by Lady Rachel Beauchamp, to state in answer to the note just received, that she declines (at the same time expressing much surprise that she should have been troubled with such a proposal) acceding to the request contained in it—nor can her Ladyship allow any person in her establishment who wishes to re-enter her house, to approach the person mentioned therein.

(Signed)

"ELIZA RICKETTS."

"There! look at the direction, and let the note be sent immediately. Fine reputable quarters—but good enough for *her*, no doubt."

The note was sealed and despatched; but for some time after, Miss Ricketts was lost in contemplation of the epistle she had been answering, and that night, when Lady Rachel rattled off to an evening party, the elderly lady equipped herself in her bonnet and cloak, and saying that she was going to visit a friend, left the house.

Agnes, in the subdued and tender state of heart and conscience to which she was reduced, felt deeply the unnatural and unmerciful result of her overture towards her mother. Soothed, however, on the subject by her brother, she had enjoyed an hour's refreshing sleep, when she opened her eyes to fix them on a face bending over her, the sight of which caused her gaze to assume a stare of startled and bewildered horror, and a smothered exclamation of that nature to issue from her lips.

"Do not be frightened, Miss Agnes—it is I; you wished to see me—did you not? Mr. Ralph's letter said so; and I am come; and your brother gave me leave to sit by your side till you awoke; but if you dislike my presence I will go."

Could this be Ricketts who spoke thus to her badgered pupil?

The still more bewildered Agnes raised herself up, as much as her strength would allow; and as she by degrees began to realize the circumstances of the case, she put out her thin, wan hand, though with some signs of distrust, of which she could not divest her feelings, and thanked the governess for having come; then, softened by the signs of tears her suspiciously steadfast gaze discerned rising in those hard eyes, as poor Ricketts grasped her extended hand, she said—

"I have met with a dreadful accident; perhaps Ralph has told you how it was all my own fault—how I have offended all those most dear to me—how bitterly I feel all that I have done amiss—not only of late years, but from my earliest childhood—for I have been very ill, and still may be dying. Now I would wish to be forgiven by all to whom I have behaved ill—and forgive those—"

Here Miss Ricketts, wiping her eyes, with nervous haste interrupted her, to beg she would not talk of her ill-behaviour now.

But Agnes continued, "and to forgive all those who may have been unkind to me."

Miss Ricketts winced, and began with flurried zeal to arrange her pupil's pillows.

"My mother refuses to hear—to men-

tion my name; did she send—did she allow you to come, Miss Ricketts?"

"Yes—no—that is to say, I did not ask her, Miss Agnes—perhaps she will be offended—but it matters not, I was your governess."

"Indeed you were!" groaned Agnes.

"And I could not resist coming when I heard that you wanted me."

"You have become very kind, Miss Ricketts," said Agnes, staring at her wonderingly; "I hope you can stay a little with me; I cannot talk much now; but what will Lady Rachel say and do to you?"

"I don't much mind, Miss Agnes," the governess answered, resignedly; "I don't expect Lady Rachel will let me enter her house again, so, if you like it, I may as well stay and nurse you." And divesting herself of her walking apparel, she took from her pocket a night-cap and her knitting—smoothed the former and laid it on a table; then, with the latter in her hands, took her post by the side of the bed, begging her pupil to go to sleep, and not mind her.

As the most devoted nurse and attendant to Agnes, had Miss Ricketts now established herself; for on despatching a message the following morning to Belgrave Square, with a note of apology to Lady Rachel, humbly requesting to be allowed to stay a few days with her sick pupil, all her worldly goods had been brought to her, huddled together only too willingly by her ladyship's envious maid, with the message that Miss Ricketts was welcome to retain her present situation as long as she pleased, for she need not presume to show her face again in Belgrave Square.

At first it was strange and startling to poor Agnes in the long weary nights, which her long confinement rendered even more sleepless and restless as her bodily health and strength began to be renewed—and she would bedew her pillow with tears of repentance and remorse as she thought of her husband—her children—longing, yearning to behold them from whom she might be perhaps separated for ever—calling upon them severally by name with earnest piteous moans—to see that jaundiced, crabbled face bending over her—those lips uttering pitying words of soothing encouragement, which had never before moved but to let forth stern commands—if not harsh invectives.

Agnes would often be wondering how such a momentous change had been brought about—what could have washed the black-a-moor white—for as great a wonder did that metamorphosis appear.

At last, one evening, Miss Ricketts, by some chance, mentioned the name of Lena, and Agnes's languid spirit aroused

to some interest by the sound of that name, she led the governess by her questions to enter upon some particulars connected with the sweet being, whose memory had never lost its impression even on the mind of her volatile sister-in-law.

And then Miss Ricketts, as she touched upon that theme, spoke till her eyes ran down with tears, or glimmered almost with enthusiasm as she discoursed upon the meek still beauty—the child-like piety—the gentle patience of that angelic creature—during that last period of her life, when it had been the blessed fate of her unworthy self to be established as her almost constant attendant and companion; the only person—her husband and Lady Rachel—relying doubtless on her unloveable attributes—had seemed to consider beyond the jealousy which in so singular a manner characterized their feelings with regard to their victim.

Then Agnes could not fail to perceive how, not in vain had been that soft breathing power of which she spoke, to melt the harsh unloving spirit of her governess by its dew of heavenly love. And whilst weeping she listened, weeping over and over again, to the simple graphic relations Miss Ricketts never tired of giving, of the sweet speeches and affecting incidents of Lena's last days—told of the unheard sighs—unshed tears with which she had bent childlike beneath the burden of sorrow and suffering with which her gentle spirit had been vexed—and finally, the pure holy calm with which the

"Pale, placid martyr sunk to sleep,"

Agnes felt as if her soul imbibed a new spirit even by the hearing—and wondered no longer at the renewing power such heavenly influences had worked on one who had seen and felt all its beauty.

In the mean time Ralph Beauchamp hopefully saw the subject of his discipline progressing favourably—still, he rejoiced but with trembling—still he withdrew not the lancet with which he probed the sorest part of his sister's heart.

She bemoaned herself as one cut off from her husband—having wearied the patience and indulgence of him to whom her spirit now clung with an intensity indescribable. She looked upon herself as one whom years of the strictest probation could alone re-establish in the eyes of her friends, as a safe and worthy guardian of her children, for whom her heart longed with agony intense.

But in her humble and contrite state, she bore it all; even as she had borne chastisement and severity in her earliest years, with touching, piteous patience and resignation.

When so far recovered as to be in a

state to travel, Ralph Beauchamp announced his intention of removing her to his house in Sussex—first allowing her to have an interview with Rachel, from whom she might receive every information concerning her children, her sister having been their guardian during their father's illness.

This further confirmation of the fate which this arrangement seemed to portend, was too much for the unhappy Agnes to endure with any degree of fortitude, and in an agony of supplication, on her knees she implored, with tears and humble entreaties, her brother to allow her a sight of her husband and children. Ralph, moved by her affliction, consented to her request, and she was taken to Hampton Court, where her husband had now returned.

There a most affecting interview took place between the husband and wife. Agnes, struck by the attenuated appearance of Gerald, penetrated with sorrow and contrition, sunk, in her own weakened condition, at his feet, imploring his pity and pardon—whilst he, more from extreme agitation and emotion than from obedience to the injunctions and entreaties he had received, acted the part of the injured and merciful husband better than could have been expected.

Her children, Agnes was suffered to embrace. General and Mrs. Cameron also saw their penitent daughter, and kindly but gravely spoke of the hope that the period might arrive, when without risk to their son's happiness they might feel justified in promoting their reunion. Poor Agnes was carried off to the Rectory, but a few weeks after, her husband was suffered to break the bounds of restraint, which the urgent entreaties and reasonings of his friends had put upon him, and flew there to join the wretched, penitent Agnes, where, for some time after—the children being brought by Rachel and restored to their mother's arms—the whole party remained.

Miss Ricketts attended her pupil into Sussex, and then departed to look after future employment, for which she long had hoped, no other than her re-establishment in her old head quarters the Towers, which by some good luck she succeeded in obtaining.

CHAPTER XLVII.

"Praising what is lost,
Makes the remembrance dear. Well, call him
hither :—
We are reconcil'd, and the first view shall kill all re-
pentition."

All's well that ends well.

"How is all this, dear Janet?" asked the young widow, when arriving at Hamp-

ton Court she was left alone, with her altered, miserable-looking sister Lady Alfred Townshend. "What is the meaning of this strange and distressing story of your having left your home, and your husband? it cannot possibly be true."

Janet answered only by her tears.

"Oh, Janet!" Annie continued, "you so strong and steadfast in affection—I cannot believe it."

"And you do not seem, Annie, to think that there may be—that there *must* have been reason—provocation for such a proceeding on my part," sobbed Janet.

"No, Janet, because, forgive me, but I can scarcely imagine any circumstance that could justify such a proceeding on the part of a wife."

"Not, Annie! when she finds herself unloved? Why did I marry Alfred?—for his title—his fortune? No! You are aware, Annie, too well, that it was his affection alone on which I had set my whole heart—my every hope of happiness. Can you not imagine—you, Annie, who first inspired me with my high imaginings of the beauty and purity of love—can you not sympathize with the impulse which moved me, on awakening with dismay and despair from my long cherished dream—when my eyes were opened to read my fate in the many examples around me—the appalling prospect of being a neglected, an unloved wife?—can you blame me that when all this horror burst upon me, I should feel it only agony to remain with Alfred under such circumstances, and that the impulse moved me to act as I have done?"

"Well, my dear Janet, allowing for the impulse which is by this time, no doubt, heartily repented of, you will now return to Stanhope-street. I have seen my father, and he, though full of concern and anxiety for poor Gerald and the unlucky Agnes, has yet determined to go in search of Lord Alfred, and in the mean time has placed you in my hands—so, Lady Alfred," she added, playfully, "you must make ready to accompany me to Stanhope-street. Come, Janet, disappoint the good-natured world by the contradiction this will prove to the exciting interest this affair of yours has afforded. No assumed reluctance, no false shrinking, if you please, for I see it is exactly what your Ladyship's heart most desires at this very moment."

Yes! Annie had seen her parents on her way through London, and received from them all the particulars they were able to give on the subject of Janet, whilst they concerted with her on the course it would be wisest to take in the annoying affair; one into which she had entered with peculiar anxiety and concern, from the secret misgivings which were in her breast that she might be the innocent and most un-

willing cause of the alienation of her sister from her husband. For she had heard from the thoughtless Agnes, who sometimes wrote to her, the fact of Lord Alfred being the great admirer and constant attendant of a Mrs. Stevens; solely, he affirmed—though she believed it was only a plausible excuse—on account of her likeness to one with whom he had never seen any to compare. Janet also in her very last letter to Annie, who little, at the time, had imagined the real feelings which accompanied the penning of the apparently lightly written words—in alluding to her picture, had added—"and I can assure you it has been gazed upon by other eyes than mine, with an interest and admiration which has made me jealous enough to hide it."

But if Annie had been in any way instrumental to the unhappy breach between the pair, it only the more moved her energetic mind to the determination that it should be repaired if any effort on her part could aid in so doing—and having agreed with her parents that the first step towards the desired end, was to promote the return of Janet to her home, she, on the following morning, without much difficulty or persuasion, effected that purpose, and a servant having been previously despatched to prepare for her Ladyship's arrival, Annie accompanied her sister to Stanhope-street.

It was evidently with satisfaction that the servants beheld their young lady return amongst them, for she had already much endeared herself to her household. Janet re-entered her home with veiled face, and eyes bent low; and when she had reached her dressing-room, and the door closed upon them, she turned to Annie and exclaimed—

"And now what am I to do? You have brought me home—but *home!*—it is no home now, he is away—perhaps he will never return."

Scarcely had the words died away on her lips, when a long, loud knock at the house door sounded on their ears.

Janet turned deadly pale, and breathlessly gasped—

"Can that be him?"

"God forbid!" was Annie's inward ejaculation, for she was not prepared for any such contingency, which appeared to her most embarrassing.

"Yes, Annie! I know it is—I hear the sound of a carriage unpacking, and—I also hear *his* voice!"

This, however, she could scarcely have done, for Lord Alfred—he it certainly was, by a strange coincidence—had merely murmured a few words of direction to the housekeeper, who pressed forward to inform his Lordship that she feared the pink boudoir was the only sitting-room in a stato

to receive him, not being aware of his Lordship's intention to return.

He hurried impatiently on, ascending the steps leading to the apartment.

It was the private sitting-room appropriated to Janet's use, and led from the dressing-room which she and Annie occupied. Lord Alfred entered, glanced round the room uneasily, then threw himself on a sofa, and again looked round with an air of grave sorrow; or it might be displeasure. He bent his head upon his hand, mused and sighed heavily, then rising, paced the room with disturbed steps.

Lord Alfred, annoyed and dismayed at the decisive and desperate step his wife had thought fit to take, had remained some little time in perplexity as to what measure to pursue. Too proud and too much piqued to think of following her to Hampton Court, yet not quite able to bring himself to treat the matter with sufficient fashionable *sang froid* to stay where he was and allow the affair to take its own course, he had at length followed the impulse which had suggested itself of going to Dieppe, where he knew the Camerons had been staying of late, and conferring with them upon the subject. Having arrived there but to hear of the departure of the family, he had now come back, provoked, worried, and not quite certain whether he should, as far as he was concerned, take any further trouble in the matter. It might be as well to let the woman, who had chosen to act a part so unaccountable and troublesome, abide by the consequences. It would be more hard upon her than upon himself after all, considering the different extents of their natural feelings. He had always thought she would suit him very well as a wife—had always admired her, nay, loved her well enough to think of her as his wife with tolerable satisfaction; but certainly after seeing once more that bewitching creature, her sister—the only being for whom he had ever felt a real passion—his feelings concerning her had considerably cooled—nay, though he had made up his mind the night of Annie's refusal in a fit of pique—of disappointed caprice, or something of the sort, to seal his fate at once, by marrying the girl who *did* love him, he had looked upon the circumstances under which the act was entered upon, as of themselves quite exonerating his conscience from any necessity to play the Benedict more strictly than his neighbours.

Lord Alfred had never dreamt of the smooth course he had chalked out for himself in marrying Mrs. Cameron's well brought up daughter, being disturbed by such unreasonable conduct. Annoying indeed he felt it, as he now re-entered the

home to which that conduct had given a most unaccountable feeling of desolation and discomfort.

He had experienced the same sensation the short hour he had passed within its walls after Janet's departure—and as he again entered the house the air of dismality oppressed his heart, and still more so when he found himself in the very apartment he had been accustomed to see graced by the presence of its fair mistress. He had been wont to enter it, careless and unmindful of any charm thereby imparted to its precincts—nay, any other lady's boudoir would have possessed more *piquant* charms for him; why then did he feel that blank—that sinking spirit which generally affects the heart, from the loss, the absence of some object dear to the heart? His eye had been wont to dwell carelessly on the fair, stately young form he had become accustomed to behold, reigning there with its innocent grace—as carelessly to meet the earnest glance of those azure “eyes so pure,” which never failed to greet him with such fond affection. And yet the want of all this he certainly now experienced, and moreover felt that, none other but that young being he had hitherto regarded in so cold and indifferent a light, would at that moment satisfy his heart.

It was with a very nervous start that Lord Alfred at length heard the door of the dressing-room gently open, and he anxiously gazed to ascertain who was the intruder, as if almost he expected it might prove a ghost.

And certainly the appearance of a ghost might have inspired him with less astonishment than did the sight of the living form he now beheld—the slight figure of Annie Mildmay, still in the same deep mourning-dress she had worn the evening when they had walked together, and she had with such indignant emotion rejected his proposal—since when they had never met till this moment.

Her crape veil was thrown back, displaying her pale, and somewhat embarrassed countenance.

“Lord Alfred,” she said, hurriedly, and in some confusion—for it was not without reluctance she had yielded to the agitated Janet's earnest entreaties that she would prepare her husband to receive her, without the coldness and displeasure her heart so dreaded—“Lord Alfred, I have brought Janet back to you,” she repeated, in her sweet, tremulous voice; “we have almost immediately preceded you in your unexpected arrival. My sister, conscious of having acted hastily, unwisely, and in a manner which might well deserve your anger, has requested me to plead with you in her behalf.—But I am sure,” she added, with sweet earnestness, “she will prove for herself the best suppliant. Yes, go

to her," Annie continued, in a gayer tone, a weight of care seemingly taken from her heart by seeing the expressive glance with which Lord Alfred eagerly rose and turned towards the door of the dressing-room—the bewilderment with which he had looked into Annie's face when she first appeared, having subsided.—"Go to her; or rather you, Janet, come here!"

And pushing open the door, she discovered to the husband's view the tall figure of his young wife, standing in the middle of the apartment, her hands clasped, her whole attitude bespeaking the deep, thrilling anxiety of her heart.

"Well, Lady Alfred!" he began, as he approached her with steps he evidently endeavoured should not appear too *empressé*, and in a tone of graceful pleasantry rather than emotion. But when Janet having humbly but hurriedly made a step to meet her Lord, with an earnest grace, he encircled her in a tender embrace, and Annie just caught a sight of a tear in the dark eye bent down upon her sister, and a nearer pressure of the beautiful figure in its light and airy summer dress, which spoke hopefully to her heart regarding the future re-establishment of a better understanding between the reconciled pair.

And when, in her dark garb, Annie Mildmay glided from their presence, with the intention of leaving the house and retiring to her sick brother's lodging,—she had shrouded her face with its sable covering, and went on her way weeping.

Poor Annie had not yet learnt to look on young wedded love without the tender chords of her heart awakening to the feeling of its own desolation.

A startling *bouleversement* was given to the exciting subject of scandal—the rumoured breach between the noble bride and bridegroom—by the issuing of cards in the names of Lord and Lady Alfred Townshend for a ball, one of the last and gayest of the season.

It was evident to all observers that there had been "Much ado about nothing," for a most uninteresting understanding seemed evidently to subsist between the host and hostess; and Lord Alfred devoted a great part of his attentions to his mother-in-law, and that in itself had a good appearance.

Mrs. Cameron looked astonishingly well, and it was reported, to the relief of chaperones and mothers in general, that for some years to come she had only one plain daughter in reserve, whom she was in no haste to introduce.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Well—our springs are over,
Oh, sweet days of yore!

BARRY CORNWALL

THE gardens of one of our fashionable Spas were honoured one evening in the ensuing summer by a very aristocratic-looking party. The Duke of Stratheden was, we regret to say, one of the many invalids who repair with hope and faith to try the skill of the great physician of the place.

By the Duchess's side on the bench she occupied, sat her friend, Mrs. Cameron. They were conversing together; their attention chiefly directed towards a group at a little distance, consisting of the General, who stood with Annie on his arm watching with smiling interest the movements of little Frank, who, with the laughing Laura and Cecil were sporting gaily to the sound of the music playing as usual at the time. Minny, too, was standing quietly by their side—plain Minny! smiling pensively beneath her still plainer straw bonnet, like a pale, modest primrose amongst bright garden flowers.

"How melancholy that waltz makes me!" sighed Mrs. Cameron; "it is one I used to play so often at Athlone, in poor Annie's days of promise—the one, I believe, to which she and poor Frank danced their hearts away; and now!—I wonder it does not strike her—but she is so absorbed in that boy."

"How beautiful she is!" answered the Duchess, "now she has left off that heavy, melancholy crape; it is like the re-bursting forth of spring; and so young—so warm in heart, and feeling; I cannot but think that you must some day see her a wife again."

Mrs. Cameron shook her head.

"You have no idea," she said, "of Annie's constancy to the memory of her buried love. I have only hinted at the subject once or twice, and her distress and surprise at the idea have taught me to dare to hope no more. No—her father and her child, as long as they remain to her, seem to be enough to fill and satisfy her faithful heart. Between those two beings her chief earthly affections seem divided, as you may perceive. I sometimes feel inclined to be provoked, for she is so captivating, and so much admired."

"And Minny," the Duchess said, after a pause, "I thought she was to have been with her sister Lady Alfred this season?"

"So Janet proposed," Mrs. Cameron replied; "but I declined. Another year hence will do very well for her, poor child! A plain girl has no chance in London—either of pleasure or profit. She is an amiable, contented creature—but

not formed to make a figure in the world, as it is called. Yet some say she looks like Lena."

"Ah! who knows," remarked the Duchess, "but that there is some one on whom she seems to have made an impression? How earnestly that man looked at her as he passed! and see, he has turned again. What a gentlemanly looking person he is!"

And her Grace raised her glass for a more particular inspection of the stranger.

"I declare it is Frederick Sackville," she cried, whilst Mrs. Cameron exclaimed in a tone of some sadness—

"Yes, I thought I recognised him, but was not quite sure."

"I did not know he was in England," the Duchess observed, as having proposed to Mrs. Cameron that they should make themselves known to him, they rose together for that purpose. "It is strange that he should appear just now," she continued gravely, "I am not sure the Duke will like to see him much, he is so extremely nervous—the least surprise affects his spirits; and you know," she added with a sigh, "that young man is the next heir."

"So I understand," Mrs. Cameron answered, and she sighed also. "It is very strange that I never knew till within the last few years that those sons of Lord T——, his uncle, were so unsound in mind and body."

"It was a sore subject with the family," the Duchess replied, "and the Duke ever had a sort of prejudice as to Frederick Sackville being brought forward in the light of heir presumptive."

"Poor Lena's first partner!" Mrs. Cameron murmured, more in soliloquy than addressing her friend.

"And first lover, from what I hear," the Duchess replied. "Frederick has great claims upon your interest, Laura—his mother confided to me some time ago, the hopeless and constant attachment of her son to your sweet Lena, which preyed on his health and spirits, quite unsettling his prospects in life. He was ever of a romantic and visionary nature; very much Mrs. Sackville's own fault, for she allowed him to feed, as a boy, on Byron and Shakespeare, rendering the young man unfit for the study of the law, for which he was intended by his friends. I often regret, dear Laura—but regrets are unavailing."

"They are so indeed," thought Mrs. Cameron in her inmost soul.

"There's your bright, lovely little Laura," the Duchess continued, "if Frederick will wait a few years longer."

"No, no, Cecilia, do not tempt me—I have done with such speculations—but we are missing our mark—Mr. Sackville has returned to the lawn. The General has recognised him, and now they are speaking together."

Yes, the wanderer had returned. The bracing influence of the ocean—the enlarging, strengthening pursuits of travel and research in new worlds, amidst new creatures, and, above all, the healthful companionship of his friend Alfred Beauchamp, had worked their power over his mind. But the change was for the better; his love was not forgotten. No! but it now came before him in the quiescence of a sad, sweet dream, which he would not if he could efface. He had never loved again; he still felt that only one like her could take her place in his remembrance. And he had wandered over the face of the earth and never found her likeness—no slightest touch of resemblance to strike the electric chord of love within his soul; never till this evening which brings him again before our readers, when having strolled into the pump-room gardens of ———, where he had arrived that day to take lodgings for his invalid mother, his eye accidentally fell upon the gentle Minny, who was smiling as she watched the gambols of her little nephew and his companions—and that smile made him, with a thrill at his heart, gaze earnestly upon her.

Was the face then like that of his lily queen—the starlight of his youth?

Yes! that one simple, pensive look of poor Minny Cameron's did more for her than the most soul-conquering flash of beauty's eyes would have effected. It won for her a ducal coronet!

"Dear Laura! I congratulate you," said, sadly but affectionately, the Dowager Duchess of Stratheden, a year after the time of the Spa garden scene, "and truly do I rejoice that it is to a daughter of my ever dear, and early friend, I resign my rights and claims."

The Duchess was now a widow, and on the day on which she thus spoke, the nuptials of Minny Cameron had been celebrated with the ex-Frederic Sackville.

THE END.

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